

TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIONS AND LEGACIES IN THE WORKS OF SIX CONTEMPORARY POETS

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Michael James, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.

Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Abstract

The thesis examines shifting representations of trade unions in the work of six contemporary poets. The thesis considers how it is that poets have come to contend with, and contribute to, narratives surrounding trade unions and industrial disputes, and puts these representations into conversation with one another. Through these conversations, the thesis attempts to question the ways in which our union narratives and our legacies are constructed, and to investigate the power dynamics that underpin the presentations of our histories (and the way they are presented to us), through a specific focus on what it means to tell the stories of our labour histories.

Trade unions have long been at the forefront of the struggle for working conditions, pay and labour politics more broadly in the UK. Taking unions as the 'subject' and using poetry as the 'medium' enables the thesis to investigate the ways in which union narratives have come to occupy the relatively marginalised position they currently inhabit in the UK's political and social landscape, while also putting forward an argument for these poems to be seen as a form of alternative 'storytelling', where questions of dominant narratives and official histories can be rightly contested. The fact that trade unions are as much about the individual as they are the collective ties into the poem's ability to affirm and extend 'community by being true to what is individual and particular'. My attention to trade unions allows an exploration of questions regarding shifting ideas of the collective, the individual and notions of (post-industrial) place.

The thesis focusses on two distinct poetic eras: from 1972 to the late 1980s through the work of Barry MacSweeney, Tony Harrison and Sean O'Brien, and the 2010s, through the writings of Helen Mort, Steve Ely and Paul Bentley. The poems discussed bring influences from other poems, from movies and from 'official' narratives on to the page, sometimes brazenly, sometimes obscured, but always with a sense that they are writing out of and into a trade union history. The thesis explores these influences and that engagement with trade union history. The poets that my research examines see our union legacies as artful constructions, foregrounding an awareness of working-class stories and histories as products, products that have been manufactured and arranged, in the same way that the poems themselves are artfully rendered and established on the page. These poems (and my work) are a continuation of, and comment on, the 'legacy' of these trade union stories and histories.

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Introduction: Introducing Poetry and Unions

You can't write a political poem if it is just about politics.

- Nick Laird, *The Irish Times* (2005)

In a lecture given in 1996, Terry Eagleton claimed that 'politics is a local transient business in which a week is a long time, whereas poetry, or at least the better sort, is universal and enduring' (Eagleton in Battersby 1996). Eagleton's assertion is overly simplistic, setting a binary between poetry and politics that implies a poetry that can only speak to the underlying, 'universal' concerns that politics raises, not to political action itself. Eagleton suggests that our politics is always new, that it is continually moving, with last week's political concerns relegated or replaced by what is deemed 'current', and therefore important. What Eagleton does not consider is that politics leaves a trail, that while the conversation may change, the political focus may shift, it creates a legacy. Eagleton continues by saying that 'politics is a question of abstract notions, impersonal institutions, collective entities. Politics involves well defined, determinant ideas, whereas poetry thrives on indeterminacy and ambiguity' (Eagleton in Battersby 1996). For Eagleton, politics is the abstract and detached made real. Politics involves the *appearance* of well defined ideas and the *attempted* control of these determinant ideas through which to fashion certain political narratives. While poetry does indeed trade on linguistic ambiguity, to call it an 'indeterminacy' is to neglect the formal establishment, arrangement and content of any poem. Poetry calls into question the 'determinant ideas' presented to us by political institutions and the groups that seek to control our narratives. These types of narrative are particularly powerful in shaping our labour histories and the legacies they create.

In terms of labour representation, how narratives are told and our legacies are constructed is more important today than it has been for many years. In August 2018, unemployment stands at 4%, the lowest rate since 1975, yet this masks a workforce that is forced to contend with increasingly precarious working conditions, zero-hour contracts and wages that are stagnating or actively declining in real terms. The miners' strikes of the 1970s and 1980s and the declining influence of the union movement that followed has left the UK in a position in which labour representation is at its lowest ever level.¹ Currently,

¹ The speed of trade union membership decline had slowed by 2010, but trade unions continue to lose members. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of union members dropped from 9.81 million to 7.89 million. By 2010, the number had fallen to 7.26 million members. The most recent government statistics put trade union membership at 6.95 million (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills 2016, 23). While the number of workers on zero-hour

there is research that examines cultural responses to the 1984-5 miners' strike and work focussing on the 'naive' poetry produced during the strike, but nothing that explores contemporary poetic responses to trade union narratives and union legacies in the UK. Katy Shaw's *Mining the Meaning* (2012) looks at poetry written by those involved in the mining industry during the 1984-5 strike. Similarly, Simon Popple and Ian W. Macdonald's edited collection *Digging the Seam* (2012) examines the fiction, film and visual art responding to the 1984-5 strike. Yet, both works neglect the unions themselves and neither work considers what role contemporary poetry (written by 'poets') can play in rethinking and questioning these strike narratives. The only work that looks at post-2000s poetry is Claire Hélie's essay 'From Picket Lines to Poetic Ones' (2015), which ends with a discussion of Helen Mort's 2012 poem 'Scab', but doesn't situate the poem within the broader canon of works dealing with strike legacies in our own time. This thesis considers the representation of trade unions in the work of six contemporary poets. It examines how these poets contend with the declining influence of trade unions in the UK, and how they confront and question the continuing (and contested) legacies that have been produced by, and in response to, industrial disputes of the 1970s and 1980s. Their poems are a place where the social narratives around our labour histories can be interrogated, retold, re-formed.

*

In June 2018, Glen Jacques, a receptionist at the University of London and member of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), wrote a letter to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, Adrian Smith. Jacques wrote that when he took up the role he 'was so proud to get a job working for a prestigious university with a good reputation, very good working conditions and a very good pension'. He had planned for the job to see him through until retirement (@IWGBUniversityLondon). Within two years, he was told that his job would be outsourced to a contract company. He could accept the move or he would be made redundant, but, either way, it meant the loss of his pension. Over the next twelve years, his job would change hands on three more occasions. In the letter, Jacques wrote in response to his treatment and many others' that 'every pyramid is only as strong as its foundation, and if the foundation is not maintained to a high standard, the pyramid will, in time, collapse' (@IWGBUniversityLondon 2018). The workers are this foundation, a foundation upon which our societies are built. It is trade unions that have long been instrumental in the provision and implementation of

contracts fluctuated from 100,000 to 200,000 workers between 2000 to 2010, between 2011 and 2016 the number of people on zero-hour contracts rocketed to over 900,000 workers, that number has decreased to 883,000 in the most recent Office for National Statistics report (Petkova 2017, 4-5).

workers' rights and responsible for the improvement of labour conditions. A recent study published by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) found that

[a]s union membership increased in the last century, there was a significant fall in inequality. However, as membership has declined since 1979, so inequality has risen to levels not seen for nearly a century. Additionally, countries that have higher rates of collective bargaining have lower levels of inequality; and within firms where there is a trade union present, pay inequality is less. (Institute for Public Policy Research 2018)²

Trade unions matter. The decline in trade union membership in the UK is a problem. It is a problem tied to the narratives and stories that are told in regards to what a trade union is, what they do and the role they have played and continue to play in contemporary British politics.

According to the Office of National Statistics, in the UK, around 6.2 million employees are members of a trade union, which accounts for 23.5% of the current working population. If we compare this with the peak of UK trade unionism in 1979, when 13.2 million employees were members of a union, from a significantly smaller population base, it is not difficult to argue that in real terms the trade union movement's influence and reach is in decline.³ A combination of restrictive legislation and public disenchantment has led to a position where 'after three decades of persecution, unions are no longer part of the workplace culture' (Jones 2012, 49).⁴ While Jones' point rings true for a private sector in which only 13.4% of employees are union members, in the public sector trade-union density is a much more robust, if declining, 52.7% (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2017, 5).

Supermarket-union representative Mary Cunningham, interviewed by Owen Jones for his book *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, provides the depressing summation that, simply, 'a lot of people these days don't even know what a union is about' (2012, 155). Micah Uetricht echoes this sentiment in his book on the Chicago teachers' strike of 2012: 'to many it is a wonder [unions] have not gone extinct' (2014, 114).

² The full report, *Power To The People: How Stronger Unions Can Deliver Economic Justice*, also puts forth ideas for improving trade union relations and representation in the UK, including appointing a Minister for Labour to improve collective bargaining and introducing a 'Right to Join' to encourage workers to join trade unions (Dromey 2018, 3).

³ In 1979, the 13.2 million trade union members were from a UK population of 56.25 million. In 2017, the 6.2 million members are from a much-enlarged population of 65.64 million. It should be made clear that these are population figures, not the number of people in work or able to work or of working age.

⁴ The 1980 Employment Act, 1982 Employment Act, 1984 Employment Act, 1986 Public Order Act, Trade Union Act 2016, to name just a few. When the Labour Party came to power in 1997, Tony Blair boasted 'that even after his trade reforms, trade union laws would remain the "most restrictive" in the Western World' (Jones 2012, 49).

Yet, as Nick Cohen writes in *The Guardian*, ‘we ought to be living in a stirring age of worker resistance’ (2018). An article written by Gavin Kelly and Daniel Tomlinson of the Resolution Foundation—a think-tank that researches living standards in the UK—asserts that ‘on the face of it you might think that the future is full of potential for trade unions’ as ‘public concerns over low pay have soared to record levels over recent years. And, after almost disappearing from view, there is an increasingly noisy debate about the quality and dignity of work in today’s Britain’ (2016, 10). While these claims are unsupported in their article, Kelly and Tomlinson go on to assert that ‘four in five people in Great Britain think that trade unions are “essential” to protect workers’ interests’ (2016, 10). However, as Cohen’s ‘ought to be’ and Kelly and Tomlinson’s ‘you might think’ suggest, union membership shows no sign of increasing—if union membership continues to decline at its current rate, the proportion of trade-union members in Great Britain will drop from one in four working-age employees to one in five by 2030 (Kelly & Tomlinson 2016, 11). We seem aware of the importance of trade unions, but there is clearly an issue when it comes to securing members.

This governmental legislation affects how trade unions are perceived. The state’s ability to control the ‘legal narrative’ surrounding trade unions feeds into the legacies that the poems in this thesis are negotiating. The legislative history of trade unions is one of suppression and statal authority and one which seeks to portray unions and collective organisation as a threat to the state itself. To understand the position trade unions currently occupy in the UK and the prevailing public perception of them, it is pertinent to see these narratives as part of a broader struggle between the state and the labouring classes. As far back as 1563, the Statute of Artificers set out ‘a regulation of labour, which sought to banish idleness, advance husbandry, and yield “a convenient proportion” of wages’ (Hargreaves 2009). In effect, it became a ‘criminal offence for a workman to strike [...] if he thereby broke his contract with the employer’ (Frow 1971, ix). The Statute would not be repealed until the beginning of the 1800s. Later, the 1799 Combination Act, subtitled ‘An Act to Prevent Unlawful Combinations of Workmen’, and the 1800 Combination Act further strengthened anti-trade-union legislation by outlawing any and all forms of working-class collective bargaining or organisation. In essence, the Combination Acts made trade unions illegal, even though the legislation already in place had made ‘almost any trade union activity liable to prosecution’ (Thompson 1968, 550). Yet, through this legislation, as E.P. Thompson argues, ‘we have to face the paradox that it was in the very years when the Acts were in force that trade unionism registered great advances’ (1968, 550). While it became easier to prosecute trade unionists, empowering ‘a single justice of the peace to sentence summarily a trade unionist to two months imprisonment’, trade unions themselves were simply ‘driven underground’ (Frow 1971, 3). While no “great strike” was really possible

during the Combination Laws [...] many of the labour disputes in that period were very bitter, and some were conducted with personal violence, with gross outrages, and with reckless destruction of property' (Howell in Frow 1971, 3). From the earliest days of trade union legislation, there is an underlying fear of the collective—the fear that workers might organise and use their collective weight to advance their own economic and social causes.

The 1799 and 1800 acts were not repealed until 1824, with the introduction of the Combinations of Workmen Act. However, after the repeal led to a wave of unrest and strike action, the 1825 Combinations of Workmen Act was instituted, once again severely limiting the 'legal' role of unions. 'Legal' is in quotation marks here because while trade unions were no longer technically criminal, they would not be legalised by Act of Parliament in the UK until the Trade Union Act of 1871.

This is by no means an exhaustive history of trade unionism in the UK. The book from which much of the information in the previous two paragraphs is taken, *Strikes: A Documentary History*, lists forty-one strikes of note in the hundred and fourteen year period between the Cotton Strike in Scotland in 1812 and 1926's General Strike. What lists like these cannot represent is the legacies that these events create and the cultural narratives they form. What this thesis looks to do is examine the representations of trade unions in six contemporary poets—by 'contemporary' I am referring to the period 1972 to 2015. This period begins with the 1972 miners' strike and ends with the thirtieth anniversary of the 1984-5 miners' strike. This concentration on trade union action allows an exploration of questions regarding shifting ideas of the collective, the individual and notions of (post-industrial) place. Taking unions as the 'subject' and poetry as the 'medium' enables my work to explore alternative representations and narratives surrounding trade unions, while also putting forward an argument for poetry as a form where dominant narratives and official histories can be contested. This is not to say that all of the poems here offer radical rewritings of trade-union narratives, much of the poetry is itself indebted to the histories and narratives that precede them. In fact, these poems are themselves a product of these histories and the broader cultural representations in movies and the arts that have come to inform our own thinking about trade unions. Nerys Williams contends that 'poetry is a troubled and troubling genre, full of desire and anger and support and protest' (2011, 1). While I would contend that poetry is not a genre, it is with this dynamic in mind that I am using poetry as a form through which to discuss trade union legacies. The formal possibilities of poetry allow us to address histories in a non-linear way, or they offer new access to these histories without defaulting to linear, prescribed forms. The space and arrangement of the poem forces us to address the constructed nature of our histories. Trade unions are as much about the

individual as they are the collective which ties into poetry's ability to affirm and extend 'community by being true to what is individual and particular' (Constantine 2006, 169). What these poets do, particularly those writing after 2010, is bring these influences from other poems, from movies and television and from official narratives on to the page, sometimes brazenly, sometimes obscured, but always with a sense that they are writing out of and into a trade union history. For most, the legacy of the miners' strike 1984-5 is particularly important, be that because these poets lived through the strike itself or grew up in its wake. The poets explored here understand these legacies as artful constructions, foregrounding an awareness of our stories and histories as products that have been manufactured and arranged in the same way that the poems themselves are artfully rendered and established on the page. These poems are a continuation of and comment on the 'legacy' of these trade union narratives and histories.

'Narrative' is a phrase that appears often within this thesis. 'Narrative' acts as a representation of an idea or function that reflects the aims of the whole—*the right wing media has constructed a narrative that a strong trade union movement is damaging to the working classes*.⁵ Yet, rather than reflect the 'whole', 'official' and dominant labour narratives reflect the aims of those who would seek to present their representation of labour histories as absolute or beyond dispute. My use of narrative here has much in common with Raymond Williams' 'hegemony' in that narratives are not simply concerned with 'matters of direct political control' but also come to 'describe a more general predominance which includes, as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships' (Williams 1989a, 145). Simply put, dominant narratives (constructed by powerful actors and groups) attempt to obscure those narratives and alternative voices that seek to challenge them. Dominant narratives express the needs (and wants) of a dominant class.

In regards to the poems in this thesis, narrative appears the most fitting term to describe the exploration and questioning of labour histories and union representations that I see the poems as engaging in. The poems draw attention to how these narratives are packaged and presented, as well as who controls these representations. When talking about how trade unions are presented in the poems, the term 'narrative' suggests movement and process, whereas something like the term 'image' is too static. As Susan Sontag says, albeit in regards to photography, 'a narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, to feel. No photograph or

⁵ These are my words. However, in Chapter One, this idea will be taken up with reference to the Wapping Strike and an article from *The Telegraph* in regards to the 2017 general election.

portfolio of photographs can unfold, go further, and further still' (2003, 109). At their best, narratives reveal how representations and attitudes have changed, how they developed and how they have been formed and reformed. Narrative's relation to 'story' foregrounds the (selective) construction of labour legacies and histories. The poems in this thesis are not narrative poems. The term 'narrative' works to connect the representations of labour histories and trade unions in the poems with broader conversations around what it means to write labour histories and the role of trade unions in society. The individual poems do not present static, isolated 'images', they contribute to (alternative) labour narratives and challenge those dominant narratives that seek to paint trade unions as, at best, an irrelevance.

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I. Introducing the Poets

The poets explored here write about trade unions, directly, but their motivations and approaches vary considerably.

Starting with Barry MacSweeney (1948-2000): in a note written in 1967 and published in the short-lived magazine *The English Intelligencer*,⁶ MacSweeney called for a form of poetry union, or at least an organisation of sorts, with, as Luke Roberts puts it, 'some unexpected additions' (2017, 53):

[...] a Writers Union! Its [*sic*] that ballpoint and bayonet again. for something dear to me [...] I feel closer to Russian poets than any others in the history of the world. Tribunes, that's them. Unionists in verse! Strikers with poems. I need to be a tribune.

(MacSweeney 2014, 145)⁷

⁶ *The English Intelligencer* was a poetry magazine that ran from 1966 to 1968 and was edited by Andrew Crozier, with input from J.H. Prynne. According to Luke Roberts, MacSweeney published over twenty poems and 'several combative prose statements and letters' in the magazine during its brief existence (2017, 6). MacSweeney was later to be heavily involved with the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) while working for the *Kentish Times*.

⁷ The model that MacSweeney was looking to was Vladimir Mayakovsky's Federation of Soviet Writers, whose first official meeting took place in 1926. The organisation set up their own publishing house and a 'Literary Fund for the assistance of writers (whether members of the Federation or not)' (Metcalf 1987, 614). Vardin (Illarion Vissarionovich Mgeladze), Chairman of RAPP, the Union of Proletarian Writers, said that the aim of the Federation was to 'create a Federation for unrelenting struggle against bourgeois literature' (Vardin in Metcalf 1987, 613). The Federation is not to be confused with the Union of Soviet Writers which was established by the Communist party in 1932. Poet Bob Cobbing, a friend of MacSweeney's, also attempted to establish a similar union for poets in the UK, Poets Conference. While the name 'Poets Union' was originally mooted, some of the poets did not want the word 'union' associated with their organisation. Stephen Willey argues that 'the unease that some of Cobbing's contemporaries felt about the word "union" reveals their deeper discomfort about aligning the writing of poetry with struggles in other labour markets' (2012, 254). Barry MacSweeney did not harbour any of the unease that Willey argues some of his contemporaries did.

The past five years have seen an upturn in MacSweeney scholarship with the collection of essays edited by Paul Batchelor, *Reading Barry MacSweeney* (2013), and Luke Roberts' 2017 book, *Barry MacSweeney and the Politics of Post-War British Poetry: Seditious Things*. These works owe a great deal to the Barry MacSweeney archive at the University of Newcastle, donated by MacSweeney's family a year or so after his death in 2000. In MacSweeney's *Wolf Tongue: Selected Poems 1965-2000* more than half of the book focusses on poems after 1990.⁸ Much of my focus on MacSweeney comes through the poem 'Black Torch Sunrise', although in Chapter Three I engage with one of his later poems, 'John Bunyan to Johnny Rotten', from 1997's *Ranter*, in order to examine MacSweeney's treatment of Thatcher and Scargill and the politics of naming. Written in the aftermath of the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes, 'Black Torch Sunrise' is the only poem from 1978's *Black Torch* MacSweeney chose for inclusion in his *Selected Poems*.⁹ 'In Black Torch Sunrise'—from which Roberts takes his title—MacSweeney writes that 'facts revealed / must be published / because they are seditious' (2003, 74). MacSweeney's reference to the TUC (Trades Union Congress) in this poem and its link to state power is where I take my lead in Chapter Two. In a preface to *Black Torch*, published in *Bezoar*, MacSweeney makes it clear that the starting point and inspiration for the work is the 1844 Durham miners' strike.¹⁰ For MacSweeney, the strike proved something of a turning point and an event that he saw as having its counterpoint in the industrial disputes of the early 1970s:

It laid a tough foundation which still makes the National Union of Mineworkers the strongest most radical union in the land. Ask Edward Heath. They toppled his Tory Government in May, 1973.

(MacSweeney in Roberts 2017, 62)

MacSweeney, along with Eric Mottram and others, was also instrumental in the 'Poetry Wars' in which the National Poetry Society was seized by a number of radical poets. The battle is explored in some depth in Peter Barry's *Poetry Wars*.

⁸ The poems in the book were based on selections made by MacSweeney in 1999.

⁹ Much credit and thanks must go to my PhD supervisor, Robert Hampson, for 'allowing' me to sequester his copy of *Black Torch* for almost three years.

¹⁰ The demands made by the Durham and Northumberland miners in advance of the strike were:

(1) payment by weight instead of by measure; (2) weighing by the ordinary beam scale, subject to the public inspectors; (3) half- yearly contracts of service instead of the Yearly Bond; (4) payment strictly according to the weight of coal gotten, with the abolition of the system of fines; and (5) the guarantee of at least four days' work or wages in every week.

(Webb 1921, 42)

It is depressing that the fifth demand made by the miners in 1844 is something that for an ever-increasing number of people today, with the proliferation of zero-hour contracts and 'gig' work, cannot be guaranteed.

This toppling of government not only laid the 'foundation' that made the NUM the most 'radical union', but also set in motion the concerted campaign against the trade union movement, the results of which are evident today. In terms of the strike itself, whilst almost 40,000 people went on strike during the 1844 dispute, it would end in defeat for the miners. Lord Londonderry, to whom the strikers had originally turned for help in arbitrating the dispute, decided to send a letter to the local shop-owners and tradesmen in the town of Seaham¹¹ (where the pit was located) stating that they must refuse to give credit to strikers or risk losing Lord Londonderry's significant custom. Londonderry's reasoning for this was that it was

neither fair, just or equitable that the resident traders in his own town should combine and assist the infatuated workmen and pitmen in prolonging their own miseries by continuing an insane strike, and an unjust and senseless warfare against their proprietors and masters.

('Seaham Letter' in Webb 1921, 46)

The letter demonstrates that this was a dispute about class as much as anything else.¹² The end of the strike came when the mine owners imported workers from Ireland and rural Wales, both places chosen specifically because of their lack of an organised labour movement (Engels 2009, 257). As MacSweeney writes in the poem 'Black Torch':

stoppage is almost total
the union is the most effective
ever seen
in the two counties

(1978, 15)

The way to undermine an effective strike is to undermine the union. According to MacSweeney, it is not simply that the strikers or miners are effective, but that the union itself must be effective too. The 'union' is the workers and their representatives both working towards the same end. The 'union' coming directly after the line-break at 'total' situates it as the support for the 'stoppage'. The 'stoppage' literally rests on the union. However, there is also something suggestive here regarding the success of a union being

¹¹ It is probably worth noting that the poet Bill Griffiths chose Seaham as his adopted home for the last years of his life. Bill Griffiths, who was a contemporary of MacSweeney's, also published the book, *Pitmatic: Talk of the North East Coal Field* (2007), about the dialect of pit workers in the North East.

¹² Londonderry and the strike are actually mentioned by Friedrich Engels in the book *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, where he writes that 'this "noble" lord made himself the first clown of the turnout in consequence of the ridiculous, pompous, ungrammatical ukases addressed to the workers, which he published from time to time, with no other result than the merriment of the nation' (Engels 2009, 257).

through 'stoppage', their lack of progress. As Luke Roberts says in reference to the period during which *Black Torch* was written and published:

Where *Black Torch* had begun in the triumphant afterglow of the successful National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) strikes in 1972 and 1974, it ended with the collapse and betrayal of the trade union movement, paving the way for Thatcherism.

(2017, 74)

MacSweeney is a poet who, for all his involvement with the union movement and his clear belief in the power and necessity of trade unionism, clearly holds reservations regarding parts of the union movement as an organisation and those steering the future of trade unionism.

Unlike MacSweeney, Tony Harrison's inclusion is no surprise in a work about poetry and trade unions. Harrison's poem 'V.' (1985) is arguably the best-known of his poetic works and, following the broadcast of the poem on Channel 4 in 1987, has received more complaints than any poetic work in postwar Britain. It is surely the only poem to find itself subject to debate in the House of Commons Early Day Motion under the banner of television obscenity.¹³ The actual (ludicrous) motion tabled by MP Gerald Howard, now Sir Gerald and still a Conservative Party MP, reads:

This House is appalled at plans by Channel 4 to screen with the approval of the Independent Broadcasting Authority the poem 'V.' by Tony Harrison; whilst recognising that the poem may not be wholly devoid of literary merit, considers that the stream of obscenities contained in the poem is profoundly offensive and will serve to hasten the decline of broadcasting standards[.]

('No. 31 Notices of Motions: 27th October 1987 in Harrison 2008, 60)¹⁴

While the broadcast of the poem came only a few years after the 1984-5 miners' strike, when it was still a sensitive issue politically and socially, the Commons Motion is purely concerned with the 'obscurities' that threaten 'broadcasting standards'. There are dozens of expletives in the poem, with the *Daily Mail* noting that 'the crudest, most offensive word is used 17 times' ('Four-Letter TV Poem Fury' in Harrison

¹³ The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) said that they received thirty-two letters 'expressing concern about the decision to show v.' prior to the poem even being broadcast. Of these thirty-two, 'seventeen were from Conservative MPs and one from a Liberal MP' and most seemed to have been 'inspired' by the self-appointed defender of British morals, Mary Whitehouse. After the broadcast, the IBA received only six letters, of which four were complaints, and two of those were from MPs ('Public Response to "V"' in Harrison 2008, 73).

¹⁴ Norman Buchan, a Labour MP for Paisley South at the time, did have some suggested amendments to make to the motion: 'Line 1, leave out "at" to end and add "the apparent failure of certain honourable Members to have read the poem V or, if they read it, to have understood it; points out that the whole purpose of the poem is to emphasise the real offensiveness of the obscenities referred to"' (No. 31 Notices of Motions: 27th October 1987 in Harrison 2008, 60).

2008, 40).¹⁵ Fear of obscenity aside, the poem itself was written in a 'vandalised cemetery in Leeds during the Miners' Strike' (Astley in Harrison 2008, 35). However, as Terry Eagleton comments in his review of the poem, 'the actual Miners' Strike impinges on v. [sic] hardly at all, other than in a moving epigraph taken from Arthur Scargill' (Eagleton 1991, 350). I agree with Eagleton insofar as the miners' strike is only confronted explicitly in the one or two stanzas that I discuss in detail in Chapter Two. However, as the epigraph is from Scargill, a figure who in the 1980s could in no way be considered politically (or socially) neutral, the poem indirectly invokes issues of class and power and, as a corollary, workers' movements and unionisation more broadly. Indeed, as Harrison notes in his lecture 'The Inky Digit of Defiance', given at the ceremony for the inaugural PEN Pinter Prize in 2009, 'what aggravated many even more than the language was that they thought I had dedicated the poem to Arthur Scargill, the leader of the miners' union' (Harrison 2017, 458). The fact that Harrison had not dedicated the poem to Scargill, but simply included a quotation from him as an epigraph, is nonetheless an inflammatory reference when dealing with a figure (and an event) that provokes such strong reactions in many. The simple inclusion of Scargill, particularly as the work's opening gambit, means that 'V.' is wedded to the miners' strike 1984-5 and the trade union movement that Scargill had come to represent.

The issues surrounding class and industrial decline that 'V.' interrogates have been found throughout Harrison's work. On stage, Harrison's adaptations of the medieval mystery plays *The Nativity*, *The Passion and Doomsday* have biblical figures in the uniforms of miners, painters, butchers, ticket conductors, etcetera.¹⁶ Indeed, *Doomsday* opens with God illuminating the head of Jesus with a miner's lamp and stating, with a nod to the labouring classes and more specifically miners, that 'to hell now will I fare / To claim back what is mine' (Harrison 1999, 162). The play, about the end of the world and God's

¹⁵ In the 2011 essay 'V.--Tony Harrison's Poetic Dialectic', Wojciech Klepuszewski quotes from a routine by the comedian Andy Parsons in 2009 claiming that:

Years after, the fact was humorously recalled by Andy Parsons during one of his stand-up acts, when he rightly pinpointed that after the film was shown, 'over the course of the next 2 weeks they got 42 thousand complaints from people who hadn't heard the original broadcast, but had heard that they might get offended, so they decided to tune in after the event to see if they were offended and were duly offended'.
(Klepuszewski 2011, 22)

While Parsons did perform the above-mentioned routine on a broadcast of *Live at the Apollo*, I cannot see how or why Klepuszewski has linked it to Harrison. Parsons makes no mention at all of Harrison's work and, due to the date of the broadcast and the mentions of 'Radio 2' and 'prank phone calls' that Parsons makes, Parsons is referring to the Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross sacking that came to be dubbed 'Sachsgate' ('Live at the Apollo: Series 4 Episode 5', 2009).

¹⁶ The stage directions which open the text of *The Nativity* and *The Passion* are almost identical: 'The company in the various uniforms and overalls of carpenter, painter, butcher, fireman, bus conductor, ticket collector, fishmongery, miner, mechanic, meat-porter, cleaner, gas fitter, construction worker, etc., greet the audience as they arrive and talk with them' (Harrison 1999, 11).

disillusionment with man, has the miners' lamps searching for an entrance into hell, as a symbol of miners' descent into the dark of the pits for work, but also as a comment on the decline of the mining industry in the North East where over one hundred pits were closed between 1950-1970. First staged in 1977, the plays—perhaps coincidentally—really came to public attention in 1985, when *Doomsday* was nominated for an Olivier Award for play of the year.¹⁷ Bill Bryden, director of Harrison's three plays, won the Olivier for director of the year ('Olivier Winners 1985').¹⁸ In 1998, Harrison wrote and directed the film-poem *Prometheus*, which uses the myth as a template by which to examine the political and social issues faced by the working classes towards the end of the twentieth century. In one of the few essays on the film, Edith Hall has claimed that 'the eye of history will later view Harrison's *Prometheus* as the most important artistic reaction to the fall of the British working class as the twentieth century staggered to its close' (2002, 129). Hall sees *Prometheus* as a reaction to a fall that has already happened, while 'V.' takes place very much in the midst of the fall itself. *Prometheus* is set in a mining community in Yorkshire and, according to Hall, by defending these mining communities, Harrison accepts 'into art heroes even less acceptable than destitute vagrants' (2002, 133). Hall sees this acceptance as a radical move on Harrison's part: 'it is one thing for a poet to support oppressed causes which have been legitimized by mainstream western liberal ideology, such as women and ethnic minorities', but another entirely to 'make heroes out of the white male working class, especially the National Union of Mineworkers' (2002, 133). Hall is asking how it is that art (and poetry more specifically) is valued and how we value those who are represented through art within the context of 'western liberal ideology'. As I established earlier in the introduction, it is true that at the end of the twentieth century the UK had some of the most illiberal union legislation in the Western world, and that being working class had become something to 'leave behind'—at least according to John Prescott and Tony Blair who announced 'we are all middle-class now' in the run up to the 1997 general election ('Profile: John Prescott' 2007).¹⁹ Yet, this political rhetoric is somewhat at odds with the research findings of the British Social Attitudes group whose studies showed that in 2012 approximately three in ten people identified as being middle class and six in ten as working class, both of which remain at almost exactly the same levels as in 1984 (Park et al. 2012, 4).²⁰ However, to return to Hall, Harrison does say that cinema can 'give heroic stature to the most humble of faces' and

¹⁷ *Doomsday* lost out to Peter Barnes' black-death comedy *Red Noses*.

¹⁸ *The Mysteries* were also filmed by Channel 4. Unlike 'V.', their broadcast caused no outcry.

¹⁹ This was an echo of John Major's inaugural speech as Conservative Party leader when he said he wanted to create a 'classless society' (Major) and Margaret Thatcher's claim in a 1992 Newsweek article that class was 'a communist concept' (Thatcher, 'Article For Newsweek').

²⁰ It should be noted, however, that the BSA's findings also suggest that class in 2012 is no longer politically mobilised as it was in 1984 and that 'although people are no more or less likely in 2012 as in 1984 to self-identify with the working or middle classes, the salience of class has declined substantially for people' (Park et al. 2012, 4).

that for Harrison, in *Prometheus*, this became essential ‘in a film where the most unlikely wheezing ex-miner is slowly made to represent Prometheus’ (1998, xxii). Harrison makes workers ‘heroic’: a miner becomes he who would defy the gods by stealing fire and giving it to humanity. By making grand and dramatic the behaviours, intentions and language of the miners, Harrison asserts that the working-class (industrial) experience has a place in literature and particularly in poetry. As far back as 1974’s ‘Them and [uz]’, Harrison’s work has struggled against a conception of poetry that is purely there to ‘glorify’, or represent and speak to, an elite. In this poem, a teacher opines in relation to Harrison’s northern accent and reading of Macbeth that “‘Poetry’s the speech of kings. You’re one of those / Shakespeare gives the comic bits to: prose!’” (1995, 33). Harrison writes in the opening lines to the poem’s second section: ‘So right, yer buggers, then! We’ll occupy / your lousy leasehold Poetry’ (1995, 34). ‘Leasehold’ conjures an image of poetry only being ‘rented’ by the elites. Or, perhaps more fittingly, it is the elites who ‘own’ poetry, and they are the ones who lease it out, with Harrison proposing to ‘occupy’ poetry rather than paying rent. Harrison’s ‘occupation’ in the poem suggests the language of struggle of ‘them’ and ‘us’, the language of using, taking control and establishing a place for oneself. Yet, Harrison, particularly in ‘V.’, foregrounds and interrogates easy (and lazy) categorisation, while drawing attention to the relatively privileged position that is required to make art in the first instance:

*Aspirations, cunt! Folk on t’fucking dole
 ‘ave got about as much scope to aspire
 above the shit they’re dumped in, cunt, as coal
 aspires to be chucked on t’fucking fire.*
 (2008, 17)

‘Aspirations’ are tied up with economic security and freedoms. By aligning those on the ‘dole’ with ‘coal’, Harrison suggests that without work you lose political and social agency, you become nothing more than an object to be ‘chucked on t’fucking fire’. Sean O’Brien claims that what most concerns Harrison is the power that language ‘confers, and the restraints under which some of its users labour’ (2012, 33). Harrison’s work is about the ways in which language can be ‘wielded’—as both weapon and tool—and the politics of exactly who is ‘included’ or ‘excluded’ from this wielding of language. Having said all of this, Harrison’s work touches much more lightly on trade unions than MacSweeney’s. However, any examination of trade unions within contemporary poetry without the inclusion of Tony Harrison would be lacking one of the key figures in the discourse surrounding poetry and contemporary industrial (and social) politics.

Although he is a pre-eminent critic of Harrison and contemporary poetry, Sean O'Brien's inclusion within this work is for his poetry.²¹ In the brief biographical introduction to O'Brien that is given by poets W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis in the book *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry* (2002), he is described as being 'among the most expressly political of contemporary poets'. In particular, Herbert and Hollis make the claim that O'Brien's work 'often reflects the fierce regional inequalities stoked-up under Thatcherism.' (2000, 296). These regional inequalities point towards the widening, both culturally and economically, of the North-South divide, the decline of industry in the North and the rise of the financial and service sectors in London and the South. This concern with the insidious effects of Thatcherism extends throughout his work, from his first collection, *The Indoor Park* (1983), in which O'Brien writes in 'The Park by the Railway' of 'Coal and politics, invisible decades / Of rain, domestic love and failing mills / That ended in a war and then a war' (2012a, 11), all the way to his most recent collection, *The Beautiful Librarians*, where he reminisces about a time in which 'someone stole the staffroom tin / Where we collected for the miners, for the strike they couldn't win' (2015, 6).²² These poems highlight the concern with politics and more specifically Thatcherism and union action that often characterises O'Brien's poetry. These selections from two works published over thirty years apart shows a writer undoubtedly engaged with questions regarding the legacies of industrial action in their poetry.

During the period in which *The Indoor Park* (1983) was published, O'Brien worked as a teacher in a comprehensive school in Sussex. In interviews, O'Brien has credited this period with helping to instill a certain political focus and 'education' into his work:

It was the high period of Thatcherism and the social contrasts between south and north were very marked, not just economically but at the level of attitude. It introduced a kind of political education into the poems; that and the miners' strike.

('A life in Writing: Sean O'Brien', 2001)

²¹Of the poets included in this thesis, Sean O'Brien is perhaps the most 'lauded' by the poetic establishment in the UK over the past few decades having been nominated for the T.S. Eliot Prize four times winning once for 2007's *The Drowned Book* and being shortlisted a three further times—for *Downriver* (2001); *November* (2011); and *The Beautiful Librarians* (2005). *The Drowned Book* also won the UK's other major poetry prize, the Forward Prize for Best Collection—according to the website, 'Britain's most coveted poetry prize' ('Forward Prizes for Poetry 2018')—becoming the first collection to win both the T.S. Eliot and the Forward Prize in the same year.[#] In 2011, John Burnside's *Black Cat Bone* was the second book to win both major awards in the same year. Before winning in 2007 with *The Drowned Book*, O'Brien had already twice won the Forward Prize for Best Collection: 1995—*Ghost Train*; 2001—*Downriver*.

²² O'Brien has spoken about this event in an interview with Andrew McAllister printed in the short-lived poetry magazine *Bete Noire*: 'We ran a collection for the NUM. Somebody stole it. I don't know who. It didn't raise that much money [...] being the kind of place that it was' (O'Brien in Woodcock 1998, 55). This 'kind of place' was the Sussex comprehensive school he was working in at the time.

O'Brien makes it seem as if these political attitudes introduced themselves into his poetry, yet they are a choice, a choice formulated out of the combination between his personal and political experiences. The ambiguity around 'political education' points towards some of the difficulties surrounding political poetry: is it polemic? Didactic? Argument? O'Brien's phrase 'political education' involves both the idea of instilling within his work a 'public' and outwards-looking politics to be conveyed to a readership, and also a self-reflexive (and self-reflective) education in which poetry exists as a form by which to 'improve' oneself and to think through the inevitable missteps and misunderstandings that education entails. In 'Another Country', O'Brien writes, with regard to the legacy of the miners' strike 1984-5, that: 'Where all year long the battle raged, there's 'landscape' and a plaque, / But though you bury stuff forever, it keeps on coming back:' (2015, 7). The poem brings into a shared space the image of the 'plaque' with that of an industrial 'landscape'. O'Brien puts them in 'conversation', demonstrating the ways in which our histories come to be managed. Yet, this management is not absolute. The starting point is not simply in a slavish response to the events and the political attitudes themselves, but in poetry as a generative form, as a way of creating something new, of adding a new voice or dimension to a narrative and as a way of considering the ways in which we respond to our politics and political elites. This is an idea of a poetry that is both intrinsically public and political. In an interview he gave to Andrew Mitchell in 1992, O'Brien sets out his view on the interplay between the private and the public:

the effort of the poem is to see the process as a whole, to see it entire; not to say "There's politics and here is the private life", but to suggest that the two are inextricably bound up with each other, that they are really metaphors of each other.

(O'Brien in Woodcock 1999, 38)

This 'effort' that O'Brien speaks of situates poetry as itself a form of labour power. O'Brien's 'inextricably bound' points to a conception of the politics of his poetry, and perhaps 'political poetry' more generally, as a representation of a system that helps reveal different forms of (seemingly disparate) lived experience. Woodcock sees in O'Brien's work a poetry that is 'concerned with rendering the concrete experiences which the imagination offers in such a way as to reveal that complex process at work and hence display the interconnections between the seemingly different categories or areas of human experience' (1999, 38). To put this more explicitly, for O'Brien at least, poetry is the form in which to synthesise those levels of 'the psychological, the social, the economic, the political' (Woodcock 1999, 38). Poetry can perform those complexities of rendering the 'whole', the 'entire', the links and webs, the bindings and the boundaries, in such a way as to bring to the page disparate forms of experience presented as a unified, but not uniform, representation.

MacSweeney, Harrison and O'Brien are in some ways the 'foundation' upon which this thesis is built. They are the writers who confront issues regarding labour representation and strike action. Their responses, while not always immediate, come from a place of experience, the experience of those living through the strikes, whilst not necessarily engaging with them directly. All three lived through the major labour disputes of the 1970s and 1980s. They are three poets whose engagement with the disputes and issues my work focusses on is pronounced. My work is interested in how those poets, those 'onlookers' and observers, respond to these events.

*

How do two different generations of poets, writing at a remove from the events themselves, confront these events within their own historical moments? As the thesis developed, my work moved more and more to the North of England.²³ MacSweeney, Harrison and O'Brien constitute my foundation as I seek to explore the ways in which the ideas constructed and presented by these poets have been picked up upon, ignored or simply refashioned by a later generation of British poets. Therefore, it follows that the more contemporary poets this work looks to also hail from the North, and generally the North East, of England. The thesis in large part focusses on 1976 to 1988 and 2010 to 2015, quite simply because poetry that concerns itself with trade union issues appears and reappears in these periods. The first period traces the end of the 1972 and 1974 miners' strike through to the immediate aftermath of the 1984-5 miners' strike. After 2010, there appear a number of newer poets, most of them publishing their first collections or pamphlets, whose work starts to engage with union action and industrial disputes, particularly with regards to the 1984-5 miners' strike and its twenty-fifth and thirtieth anniversaries.²⁴

²³ There is, however, a Welsh mining and poetry tradition. There is the poet and miner Idris Davies (1905-1953) whose work comes too early for the period I'm looking at. Davies' most famous work is the extended verse *Gwalia Deserta*, published in 1938, which is concerned with the Great Depression, the failure of the 1926 General Strike and the various Welsh mining disasters of the 1920s and 1930s ('Welsh Mining Disasters, Accidents And Death Lists')—'O what is man that coal should be so careless of him, / And what is coal that so much blood should be upon it?' (Davies 1972, 27). *Gwalia Deserta* is probably better known in the song 'The Bells of Rhymney' by the folk singer Pete Seeger who used sections of Davies' poem as the song's lyrics, or the cover version of the song by The Byrds from their album *Mr. Tambourine Man* (1965). Davies' fellow countryman Mogg Williams, something of a successor to Davies, writes almost solely about mining in poems such as 'Redundant Miners' in which 'talk was all they had' (1996, 34) and 'Pit Closure' where the closure of the colliery leaves 'a black no man's land' (1996, 27). Williams was also recognised by the Welsh Eisteddfod for his contribution to Welsh working-class culture (Heath 1997)—the Eisteddfod being a celebration of the culture and language of Wales and often includes competitive poetry recitals and musical performances. The work of the Welsh poet Jean Gittins is also explored in Chapter Five. I can only speculate whether or not other major mining areas like Kent have their own tradition of mining poetry in the way that the North East definitely does and Wales also shows signs of having.

²⁴ This period also saw the election of the first Conservative government since 1997, the after-effects of the 2008 financial crash and the huge increase in precarious and zero-hour contracts.

2011 saw the publication of Paul Bentley's pamphlet *Largo*. The pamphlet includes 'The Two Magicians' which occupies most of the pamphlet and my thinking about Bentley's poetry. The poem draws heavily from Bentley's experiences of growing up in Yorkshire during the 1984-5 strike—cut through with numerous references to literature and pop culture, and underpinned by lengthy quotations taken from the oral history, *Thurcroft: A Village and the Miners' Strike*.²⁵ One stanza in 'The Two Magicians' opens with the lines: 'Into the blue unclouded weather. / *It were like a holiday.* / Trailing my shadow the other way. / My Morrissey melancholy' (Bentley 2011, 19). Bentley presents us with a line from Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott', before moving to the words of a miner, a repurposed line from Proust and, finally, a reference to the singer from the band The Smiths.²⁶ It is the 'splicing' together of these layers of 'cultural awareness' that, as Matthew Stewart suggests in his review of the pamphlet, portrays 'a voice that wants to belong in spite of the separating force of its load of acquired knowledge' while at the same time juxtaposing and intermingling 'higher and lower linguistic register[s]' in its portrayal of the strike (2012). The poem questions how our narratives come to be formed, who speaks them (and is able to) and the ways in which our cultural pasts come to influence and shape the present. Bentley is a little unusual among the poets included here in that he has yet to publish a full poetry collection, and, while his poetic work is mentioned in Claire H  lie's essay 'From Picket Lines to Poetic Ones', there has been no critical engagement with Bentley's poetry and even less media recognition. Indeed, Bentley is probably better recognised for his critical work on Ted Hughes, particularly the book *Ted Hughes, Class and Violence*.²⁷

Conversely, Helen Mort has long been recognised for her poetry.²⁸ She has been described as 'the standout poet of her generation' (Runcie 2014). Mort's second collection, *No Map Could Show Them* (2016) is something of an ode to the struggles and ambitions of female mountain climbers and the 'affinity' she sees between the notion of a climb as a 'set of instructions for the body' and the poem as a 'set of instructions for the reader' that can't be paraphrased, only read or written (Runcie 2014). This notion of poetry is somewhat counter to Eagleton's argument from the beginning of the chapter regarding the 'ambiguity' of poetry. Mort sees poetry as a form of directing a reader, of determined ideas

²⁵ In an email to me regarding 'The Two Magicians', Bentley said that David Peace's *GB84*, itself about the 1984-5 miners' strike, also constituted part of his research for the poem (2017). Peace himself lists *Thurcroft* in the 'reading list' regarding his own research for *GB84*, and draws quite heavily from the book itself.

²⁶ The Proust reference comes from Volume Two of *Remembrance of Things Past*: 'It would happen that Gilberte let me go without her, and I would move forward, trailing my shadow behind me, like a boat that glides across enchanted waters' (2006, 1009).

²⁷ For me, the most important part of the book is Bentley's work on Ted Hughes' laureateship and Hughes' relative silence on the miners' strike. This is looked at in Chapter Five.

²⁸ Mort won Foyle's prestigious Young Poet of the Year award five times as a teenager and was nominated for the T.S. Eliot and Costa Poetry Awards for her first collection, 2013's *Division Street*.

not left to chance. Mort's debut collection, *Division Street* (2013), in its cover art (a photograph by Don McPhee of a striking miner confronting a police officer) and its central and longest poem, 'Scab', puts trade unions, literally, front and centre. Of 'Scab' Mort has said that:

I felt a great urge to write it because my generation grew up with the legacy of the miners' strike and Thatcherism, which marked both the landscape and the lives of everyone in the area in one way or another. We need to keep the memory of that time alive. Orgreave and the strike were about divisions in society, not just among the miners.

(2016)

What is clear from Mort's comments is that her work is contending with legacies, legacies into which she was born, in 1985. Mort is very much a child of the strike. In 'Scab', her engagement is with the aftermath of the 1984-5 miners' strike and what it means to write histories of political and social upheaval, the need to keep memories 'of that time alive' and how it is we come to construct those memories in a 'landscape' marked by the after effects of Thatcherism in the UK. Yet, in an interview she gave to *Granta*, Mort talks of how she felt, in regards to being 'hardly born at the time of the strike', that in some ways she 'wasn't qualified to say anything about' the dispute (Mort & Allen 2013). Mort's use of the word 'qualified' moves between ideas of officialdom, the notion that one could in any way be officially recognised or trained to talk about events beyond their immediate experience, while also playing on the idea that all of our recollections are in some ways 'qualified', in that they will only ever be an approximation of the 'event' itself and our own 'experiences'. Here Mort reveals something that my work intends to consider, not just regarding what stories we tell, but who tells, and who feels able to tell, our stories to and for us.

The final poet of this triumvirate is Steve Ely and his first two published collections, *Oswald's Book of Hours* (2013) and *England* (2015)—of which *Oswald's* was originally conceived as being a section before becoming a book in its own right. *England* opens with an epigraph from William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* that appears to underpin much of Ely's work: 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (2015, n.p).²⁹ For Ely the past is part of our present. It is a present in which the past exists as an actor in poems (and playlets) that have the Duke of Wellington at war against Peter Mandelson and Arthur Scargill rubbing shoulders with ex-British National Party leader Nick Griffin. Ely has said that 'behind both *Oswald's Book of Hours* and *England* is a vision of England in which fifteen hundred years

²⁹ The quotation, slightly adapted, was also used by Barack Obama in a discussion on race relations in America, when he was campaigning to become the Democratic Party's Presidential nominee. The actual words that Obama said were: 'The past is not dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past' (Horton 2008).

of history, culture and language exist simultaneously as an irreducible synoptic unity' (Ely & Pugh 2015). The past lives with us, it is an active part of the present. It is simply part of the thing itself, incapable of division. Or as Sheenagh Pugh puts it 'the past is not past: it is in the present and intrinsic to it; it is how the present came to be' (2015).

Ely claims now to be 'politically quiescent' on the grounds that, since renouncing political party membership in 1996, he doesn't 'count simply "having opinions", even on social media (or in poems), as being politically engaged'. He says that one has 'to join, campaign, organise, commit, sacrifice' in order to be politically active (Ely & Pugh 2015).³⁰ While Ely suggests that the writing of poems doesn't mean one is politically engaged or active, that does not exclude the poems themselves from being politically motivated. Ely's work is unquestionably political and frequently trade-union focused. Where most of the other poets in my work, bar MacSweeney, narrow their union focus to the strike of 1984-5, Ely's poetry ranges far more widely 'with an imperative sense that this England is continuously one language, one people, and one landscape' (Brown 2016). *Oswald's* includes a poem entitled 'Arthur Scargill' which credits Scargill with a range of achievements including providing miners with 'health' and holidays in 'Palma de Mallorca' (Ely 2013, 71). Ely's second collection, *England*, continues in a similar vein to *Oswald's* and includes numerous references to Arthur Scargill and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), along with the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT). In Ely's 'England'—his poetic conception of England being very much a northern, male one—trade unions are a part of the language, people and landscape and 'how the present came to be'.³¹

Peter Riley has said that it is '*always* worrying when poets get involved in politics', yet, perhaps that depends on how we understand 'involved in' (2015). The poets in my work are writing about legacies, structures of power and questions of place *through* poetic 'engagement' with trade union representations and labour narratives. What all of these poets and their works have in common is that

³⁰ Ely expanded on his political 'history' in an interview in 2012: 'I'm a former socialist – I was in and around the left for large parts of the early eighties and early nineties (with an interlude in the Green Party) and I retain some of the atavisms of the left, such as a knee jerk animus to Conservatism [...] But I haven't been a member of a political party since 1996 and my political activism since then has been non-existent.'

³¹ There is a concern with maleness throughout Ely's writing that tips over into misogyny when writing about Margaret Thatcher in 'Nothing' and an 'extremism' of language exemplified in the description of Thatcher as having an 'eelpout' in her 'slimy gusset' (2015, 124). Although, as Riley says, Ely's conviction makes it appear as though poetry is 'the only medium by which such beliefs could be represented' at all.

they see poetry as having a role to play in telling these stories, examining these issues and exploring these histories

I am placing these poets and their poems in conversation with one another, thematically, to see how they speak across and against one another—how some poems speak louder than others, how some poems turn themselves inwards and others open themselves out. This thesis does not take a chronological or author-led approach to the subject. Through the poems, I am not recounting a linear history of responses to an event—this linear history is covered in Chapter One which is on the post-war history of trade unionism in the UK—nor do I want to isolate particular responses by particular poets. I am interested in where these poems ‘overlap’ and what is created by these tensions and also the gaps that they fill, draw attention to, or leave in their wake.

II. Why Poetry?

While poetry may not have the commercial or cultural reach of novels or movies, it has an immediacy that allows it to talk directly to political issues and times of social unrest. Poetry is both an occasion and often, in the public sense, occasional. According to the Poetry Foundation, an ‘occasional poem’ is one ‘written to describe or comment on a particular event and often written for a public reading’ (‘Occasional Poem’).³² A famous example would be ‘Praise Song for the Day’, written by Elizabeth Alexander for the inauguration of Barack Obama’s first term as President of the United States. Alexander writes that ‘any thing can be made, any sentence begun’ (2009). It is written with a public in mind, written to be spoken before an audience has a chance to read it. This type of poem anticipates its own importance in that, particularly in this case, it is written knowing that the event it is commemorating is already historic. A recent example of another type of ‘occasional poem’ would be ‘This is the Place’ by Tony Walsh—also known as ‘Longfella’. Written after the 2017 Manchester Arena attack, the poem is an ‘ode’ to Manchester’s history and strength in the face of its present trauma. The day after the attack on the 22nd May 2017 in which twenty-two innocent people died, Walsh performed ‘This is the Place’ to the thousands of people who had gathered in Manchester’s Albert Square for a vigil for those who had lost

³² The Poetry Foundation website gives a number of examples of what it refers to as ‘occasional’ poems: ‘Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” commemorates a disastrous battle in the Crimean War. George Starbuck wrote “Of Late” after reading a newspaper account of a Vietnam War protester’s suicide. Elizabeth Alexander’s “Praise Song for the Day” was written for the inauguration of President Barack Obama’ (‘Occasional Poem’). Even more contemporaneously, Carol Ann Duffy’s poem ‘Campaign’, written as a response to the 2017 UK General Election results in which the Conservative Party lost its majority, works as an example of an occasional poem even though it was not necessarily written for public recitation.

their lives. Walsh's reading was broadcast around the world, and the poem republished in such places as *The Manchester Evening News*, *The New Statesman* and *The Sun*. This is the occasional poem at its best: harnessing poetry's ability to respond with near immediacy to an event and then be disseminated in such a way as to offer support and an articulation of a social 'feeling' or mood. While this is one way of thinking about poetry, of an immediacy that comes through public readings, we might also consider work that is published after an event, work that is interested in the legacies of an event, as containing elements of the 'occasional'.

Marian Sugano says of occasional poetry, in her book *The Poetics of the Occasion*, that 'the occasional poem would seem in some sense to evidence both poetry's greatest potential and its most inferior productions, its most famous works and its moments least worthy of inscription' (1992, 3). Sugano's point, a development of the one Hegel makes in volume two of his *Aesthetics* (1975, 995-6), is that the occasional poem is too indebted, too dependent on the event which inspires its creation and which allows or creates an audience for its reception. The argument is that these poems are, essentially, too concerned with events of the present: the less current the event within one's (and society's) own cultural memory, the less 'worthy' the poem that represents the event. Sugano's point seems to presuppose that 'occasional' poetry must be produced in the immediate wake, or even in advance, of the 'occasion'. The occasional poem can be immediate, as seen in the Alexander and Walsh examples; however, the gap between the occasion and the poem need not be so brief. In his defence of the poetry of Ben Jonson against the charge of being 'occasional poetry' and the 'trivial or insincere writing' that he sees this phrase as having come to indicate, Thom Gunn writes that:

all poetry is occasional: whether the occasion is an external event like a birthday or a declaration of war, whether it is an occasion of the imagination, or whether it is in some sort of combination of the two. (After all, the external may lead to the internal occasions.) The occasion in all cases—literal or imaginary—is the starting point, only, of a poem, but it should be a starting point to which the poet must in some sense stay true. The truer he is to it, the closer he sticks to what for him is its authenticity, the more he will be able to draw from it in the adventures that it produced, adventures that consist of the experience of writing.

(1982, 106-107)

It is the link that Gunn makes between the 'internal' and the 'external' and what I see as their counterpoints in the 'singular' and the 'collective' voice that interests me. If the 'occasion' is only the starting point, then the poem must be (and do) something more, be something else, than a reflection of an occasion. The occasion is generative, up to a point: and that is the point at which the poem is written and the poem itself begins to generate responses to the occasion through readers' interpretations and

encounters with the poem. Behind Gunn's notion of the poet staying in some sense 'true' to the 'occasion' which creates the 'event' of the poem itself, lurks the idea of the poem as a form by which to interrogate and reflect, in all senses of the word, the mediation between the singular and collective voice—the 'I' and the 'we' and the 'us' and the 'them'—that is at the heart of political and industrial disputes. To stay 'true', particularly to a social or political 'occasion', requires an effort to balance the twin drives of reconciliation and estrangement. This is why this work concentrates more on 'literary' poems than on poems of witness.³³ These poems and poets perform the task of reconciliation and estrangement because of their distance and lack of direct involvement in the events about which they write. While these poets were not involved in these events, they are nonetheless caught up in the legacies of them. The poet must reconcile her/his own view of an event and the official 'history' of the event with cultural products and depictions of the occasion, while simultaneously creating a work that by its very newness brings into question those 'truths' we may well have taken as absolute. While the term 'occasional poetry' has been of use to consider how it is I see the poems in this thesis as operating, it is not a term which I will be employing through the rest of the work. Quite simply, the term itself is too limiting in its conception. The poems in this thesis may grow out of an occasion, but this is a poetry that allows and foregrounds, through its formal and linguistic stylings, an ability to linger on and contend with the fractures, the complications and the language itself we use to talk about ourselves and our individual and collective histories.

I also see in the quotation from Gunn the oft misinterpreted line from W. H. Auden in 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' that 'poetry makes nothing happen'. The end of the line is overlooked: while 'poetry makes nothing happen: it survives' (1979, 81). Auden's use of the colon between 'happening'—the event—and the survival, serves as a gate or filter between the 'original' happening and the legacy of the happening which the poem exists in. The stanza ends with a reassertion by Auden: 'it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth' (1979, 81). Auden is not saying that poetry does nothing, but that poetry is itself a happening, that it is a space and a vehicle for alternative voices to be heard and narratives to be expressed.

More contemporaneously, A.F. Moritz, in his 2009 Wordsworth-invoking essay 'What Man Has Made of Man: Can Poetry Reconnect the Individual and Society?', sees contemporary poetry as 'bound up with the problem of isolation and communion' and this as being 'our basic social question' (2009). Moritz's

³³ Poetry of witness, in regards to the miners' strike 1984-5 and the Grenfell Tower fire, is considered in Chapter Five.

belief is that 'poetry is inward self-development *plus* the insistence that this must have a principal place in the public forum *plus* a third thing, a conclusion that flows from the first two' (2009). It is this 'conclusion', one which I don't necessarily see as 'flowing' from the first two 'things', but as being almost riven from them, while trying simultaneously to knit them together, that I will explore in the thesis that follows: the negotiation of the singular and the collective, the 'me/us' and the 'you/them', the public and the private, the trade union and the worker, the interior and the exterior. How is it that these things come to shape and be shaped by our labour narratives and legacies?

As the essay continues, Moritz poses the questions that seem to me essential to help in the understanding of contemporary political structures and industrial disputes:

Society certainly permits and in fact requires participation, but does it do so only at the cost of agreement to preordained structures and behaviors that are non-negotiable? In other words, can you only participate if you agree? Does society allow only certain forms of participation to be real, while others are basically illusions, distractions, games? For instance, are we required to work in the way the present economy dictates because otherwise society would collapse, while we're required to vote only to maintain the illusion we have true participation, an illusion without which we might revolt or despair and drop out, threatening the economy? Is the person who truly disagrees always thrust to the margins of social life?

(2009)

These are all questions that I will be returning to, albeit indirectly, through the rest of this work. My particular focus will be how they relate to trade unions and industrial disputes and action more specifically. Trade unions walk an unusual line between two positions. On the one hand, they can be seen as demonstrating a participation in society through the engagement in the nature and conditions of your own work and the work of others, and, in some forms, they can be seen as a way of agreeing to 'preordained structures' through the simple act of trade unions being legislated by a political body. Yet, trade unions also exist on the fringes of 'society' as ordained by political institutions. Unions question the nature of labour relations and behaviours that have been 'agreed' upon by those institutions. Trade unions are both part of the illusion and that which threatens to expose labour participation as illusion.

*

By looking at the poetry of Barry MacSweeney, Tony Harrison, Sean O'Brien—focussing predominantly on works authored between the middle of the 1970s and the mid-to-late 1980s—and the post-2010 poetry by Helen Mort, Steve Ely and Paul Bentley, I am able to argue for the ways in which their works

give a different account of the marginalisation of trade unions within contemporary political structures. Undoubtedly, the 1984-5 strike occupies much of my thinking and the thinking of the poets I have chosen to focus on. However, my intention has always been to talk to trade unions more broadly, even if, unsurprisingly, much of the poetry written regarding unions comes out of or as a response to industrial action.

III. The Chapters

Chapter One recounts the post-war trade union history of the UK. This brief history serves to contextualise the industrial disputes and political landscape about which these poets are writing and the limitations of taking a more traditionally historic or quantitative approach to cultural legacies. Chapter Two begins by looking at explicit references to trade unions in the poets' work to assess what it means to talk of trade unions as a collective and how this presents a form of unifying 'voice' that is able to speak to structures of power. I also argue for the ways in which these representations have the potential to reduce the individual members who make up unions to a homogeneous whole, removing a part of their agency as members. The latter part of the chapter focusses on the work of Helen Mort to consider what it means to exclude representations of trade unions from poems that are explicitly concerned with industrial disputes. The thesis explores how Mort's poem 'Scab' shifts focus away from unions in an examination of the ways in which certain alternative voices become excluded from 'mainstream' narratives and legacies. Chapter Three turns from considering ideas regarding collectives to those of the individual, with particular attention paid to the two most recognisable and divisive figures of the miners' strike 1984-5, Arthur Scargill and Margaret Thatcher. Through a consideration of the politics of naming, the chapter explores the ways in which Scargill and Thatcher are 'constructed' through various acts of naming in the poems. It argues that these acts reveal the means by which various actors attempt to institute forms of cultural dominion and/or opposition in regards to British labour politics and trade unions. Chapter Four is more explicitly about legacies. The chapter takes the North as a starting point, and later narrows its focus to the North East, making use of Harold Proshansky, Abbe Fabian and Robert Kaminoff's concept of 'dysfunctional spaces' and 'place-identity', to discuss the ways in which legacies—specifically regarding trade unions and industrial action—are liable to become co-opted and appropriated by those from 'outside' of these communities. The chapter closes with a discussion of a number of 'industrial decline' movies that are referenced in the poems to probe how these cultural products and the ways in which they retell and repackage these strike narratives can come to obscure

the sources from which they originate. Furthermore, the chapter considers how these retellings can begin to put into question our 'place identities' or even 'invalidate' the way we talk about 'our' histories. Chapter Five begins by considering poetry produced by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and miners' organisations themselves in regards to the strike of 1984-5 to examine this almost 'naive' poetry as a form of poetic 'witness' and to question what it means to write poetry that is in the process of attempting to establish its own narrative about an event, counter to 'official' narratives. The chapter continues by discussing the role of the poet laureate, with particular attention paid to Ted Hughes, who held the position for the majority of the 84-5 strike, to appraise the 'official' poetic responses to the strike and the space that the poets I focus on seem to be occupying.

The thesis as a whole seeks not only to address representations of trade unions in contemporary English poetry, considering how it is that poets have come to contend with and contribute to presentations and narratives surrounding trade unions and industrial disputes, but to put these representations into conversation with one another. Through these conversations, the work attempts to question the ways in which labour narratives and legacies are constructed and to investigate the power dynamics that underpin the (re)presentations of our histories (and the way they are presented to us) with specific focus on what it means to tell the narratives of our labour histories.

Chapter One: How did we get here? The History

The most important trade union work is typically quite dull. The best trade union leaders are also, by extension, interested in the boring stuff – the length of the toilet breaks, the rules governing agency workers, the quantity of the paid breaks a worker is entitled to, and so on and so forth. These are the things that matter when you work in a job at the bottom end of the labour market, not the rigid dogmas and slogans summoning a radiant utopian future, nor a new set of superiors booming at you in impenetrable jargon.

- James Bloodworth, *Hired: Six Months Undercover in Low-Wage Britain* (2018)

Tracing the major union events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the political landscape that underpins them provides valuable context by which to better explore the work of the contemporary poets in this thesis. Once the timeline is established, the ways in which the poems seek to complicate pre-existing labour narratives become more explicit. It would seem that any conversation regarding the role of unions in political culture inevitably leads itself through a history of strikes, a history of unionism that has a 'public face' and an impact on the public.

The importance of miners within the political and economic history of Britain in the twentieth century cannot be overstated; Britain, quite simply, 'needed coal, and had needed it for more than a century' (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 2). In 1920, coal accounted for 99% of Britain's fuel input for electricity generation and remained at over 50%—except during the Miners' Strike of 1984 when it dropped to around 45%—until 1995 (Department of Energy and Climate Change 2013). In 1920, with a population of 44 million (Beaumont 2011, 3), over a million people were employed as coal miners in the UK (Department of Energy & Climate Change 2013). In 1920, over 8.3 million people were part of a trade union—45% of the workforce—and yet 'even the biggest general unions were dwarfed by the 900,000-strong Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) - the aristocracy of organized labour' (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 1-2).

In Francis Beckett and David Hencke's 2009 book, *Marching to the Fault Line*, they show how the nature

of miners' working conditions 'forced' their hands in terms of unionisation and collective action:

Getting [coal] out of the ground was harsh, back-breaking and horrifyingly dangerous work, and the coal owners had a long record of exploiting men, forcing them to work long hours for little pay, housing them in hovels and skimping on the expenditure necessary to provide safe working conditions. So the miners had built up a strong trade union to protect themselves. When they went on strike, they all went.

(2009, 2)

The country's reliance on coal, the sheer number of unionised miners and the solidarity of the workers meant that throughout the twentieth century the miners were 'the vanguard of the union movement in Britain', with Britain's only general strike being called in support of them in 1926 (Jones 2012, 55).¹ The Trades Union Congress called for a 'sympathetic strike' on March 3rd 1926 in defence of miners' wages, which were to be cut when government subsidy for the industry expired in May 1926.² It was also the TUC who by day eight of the strike were continuing 'in their feverish desire to lift the General Strike without securing protection for the miners' (Cook in Frow 1971, 186). This occurred without the TUC 'even securing protection for their own members against victimisation' (Cook in Frow 1971, 186). By May 12th, the strike was over: it was a demonstration of the ability of the working-classes to organise, and a display of worker solidarity, but it was a show that ended in defeat. Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC from 1926 to 1946, who led the TUC in calling off the strike, claimed that 'the outstanding lesson of the general strike of 1926 is that authority must be invested exclusively and entirely in the directing body' (Citrine in Taylor 2000, 36). Citrine was wrong. The outstanding lesson was that a cohesive union movement is more effective than a fractured one. This idea of 'fracturing' appears through Barry MacSweeney's 'Black Torch Sunrise' and Steve Ely's 'Ballad of the Scabs' where the workers strike 'to the silence of the TUC' (2015, 139). 'Fracturing' works as a way to think about the poems more broadly, the line breaks of the poems helping to articulate the fragmentation that we see in some of these narratives. The TUC wanted a trade union movement in which they would be the sole arbiters. The TUC's need for control was what effectively ended the 1926 strike. This 'abandonment' drove a wedge between the TUC and the miners' unions that would continue in effect until the end of

¹ The general strike, over reduced wages and longer working days, lasted 9 days (4th May to 13th May), before the TUC agreed a 'return-to-work formula [...] against the wishes of the miners' leadership (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 9). The miners 'stayed out for another seven months, resenting the other unions for abandoning them' (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 10).

² A 'sympathetic' or 'sympathy' strike is one in which workers do not go on strike at their own workplaces, but strike to support other groups of workers on strike. 'Flying pickets', when workers picket at workplaces not their own, could come under this umbrella.

the mining industry in the UK. In 1927, as a direct result of the General Strike, the Conservative government passed the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act which outlawed the type of 'sympathy strike' seen during the 1926 dispute.

The standard 'history' of trade unions in the UK is generally quiet on the period 1926 to 1972, and the industrial action taken during the Second World War is often glossed over.³ However, while days lost to strike action during the war were significantly lower than the 126 million in 1926, they were still at their highest in almost a decade in 1944 with 3.7 million days lost ('Labour Disputes' 2018). It is evident that trade unions did not disappear during the wartime period. Indeed, these wartime figures should be compared with those for 2016, where the UK saw 322,000 days lost due to labour disputes, and those for 2015 with 170,000, which was the fewest working days lost since the ONS starting compiling data. Tony Dabb, in an article in *The Socialist Review*, 'World War 2: Official Secrets', writes of engineering apprentices from Clydesdale, then Coventry, Lancashire and London striking in 1941 over pay issues. The apprentices from Coventry even took the significant step of including women from the local munitions factory, marking a departure 'from the attitude that the influx of women was actually making things worse for men at work' (Dabb). In 1943, there were strikes at the Neptune ship-repair yard in Tyneside after five workers refused to join the union and a major engineering strike at the Vickers-Armstrong yard in Barrow over a basic rate of pay that had not increased in 29 years. In 1944, with the government in desperate need of coal to aid the war effort, the government demanded an increase in coal production, 'yet these extra demands were not received warmly by the miners when their demand for a minimum wage was met with a compromise deal falling far short of what they had expected' (Dabb). As a result, over 180,000 miners went out on strike in the biggest mining dispute since 1926. In his article, Dabb claims that coal mine owners were 'making huge profits out of coal production for the "war effort" by directing work into shaly seams which would not have been profitable in peacetime'. Dabb goes on to make the barely believable (and unsubstantiated) assertion that there had been such a decline in safety standards in the mining industry to the extent that by 1944 it 'meant that you had more chance of being injured as a miner than if you were fighting in the armed forces!' (Dabb). The following year, 1945, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain underwent a significant reorganisation to become the National Union

³ The Office for National Statistics website 'The History of Strikes in the UK' includes no information for any dispute between 1926's General Strike and 1972's miners' strike (2015).

of Mineworkers. Simon Heffer of the *Daily Mail* newspaper, still angry seventy years after the end of the war, believed that

for many trades unionists, the two world wars offered the perfect opportunity to blackmail their employers and the government into giving them better terms and conditions of service, and for expanding union power, with the threat that the country would suffer if the government and their employers didn't give in.

(2015)

Heffer isn't wrong in his assertion that the war did offer the 'perfect opportunity' for workers and trade unionists to lobby for better 'terms and conditions of service', but to suggest that this was blackmail is simply untrue. Heffer ignores the actions on the part of the mine-owners. In addition, not only were the above-mentioned strikes not all successful, the war rhetoric around 'national unity' could be seen as playing out through the industrial action taken between 1939-45. Rather than seeing these strikes as 'the war's most shameful secret'—the title of Heffer's article—they can be viewed as the working populace, as a result of the working conditions during the war, coming together to 'recognise a different kind of unity' (Dabb). This unity helped contribute to the higher expectations of the British public and to the spate of sweeping reforms that the Labour government began to implement after their election win in 1945: the introduction of the NHS; the nationalisation of the coal, rail and dock industries; the repeal of the 1927 Trade Union act.

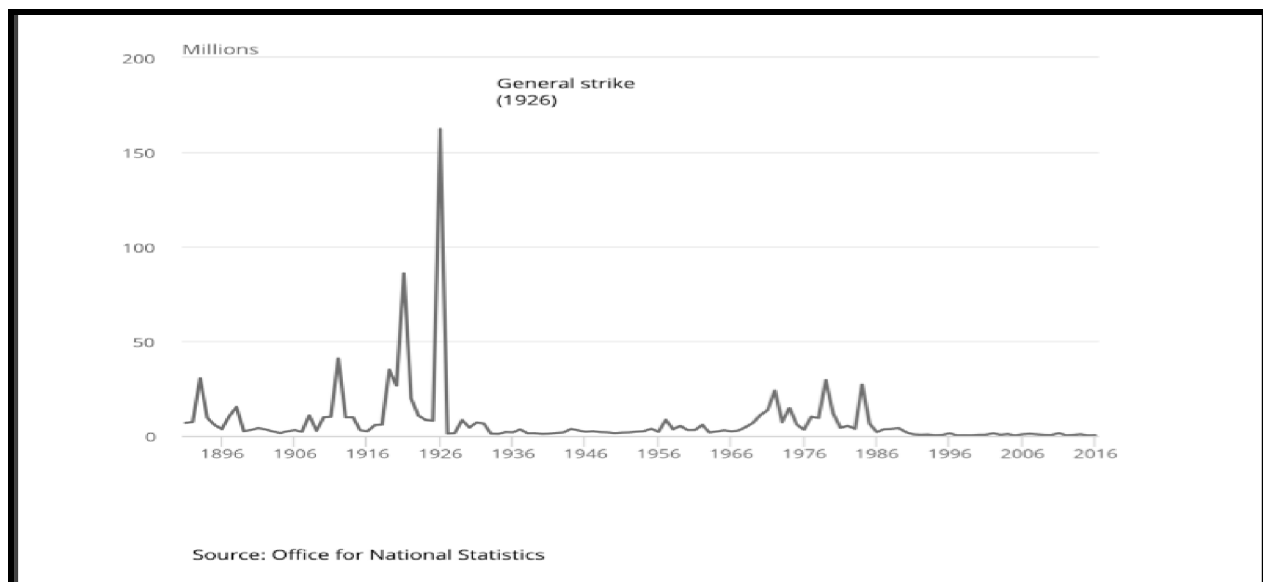


Figure. 1. Working days lost (WDL), UK, 1891 to 2016 from: Clegg, Richard. *Labour Disputes in the UK: 2016*. Office for National Statistics. 2017. P. 6.

As previously mentioned, most strike histories in the UK jump from the 1926 General Strike to the 1972 miners' strike, following a route of equating number of working days lost with a more general sense of social, cultural and economic importance.

It is clear why we attach such importance to the notion of lost working days due to strike action as it is by way of these measures that we consider the more explicit, demonstrable impact that trade unions can have. It also follows that the greater the number of working days lost, the greater the impact on the economy. However, by setting up our thinking in this way, we are in danger of coming to consider trade unions as simply a 'disruptive' force—the greater the disruption, the more importance given to the event. Yet, in response to the 1926 General Strike, historian Keith Laybourn, echoing the view of historians Gordon Phillips and Hugh Clegg, claims that 'in no significant way could the 1926 General Strike be considered a turning point or watershed in British industrial history' (1993, 103).⁴ Regardless of whether one were to support Laybourn's view or not, what I am attempting to bring to light here is that society has long considered trade unions and their 'contributions' through largely quantitative means. This process is useful in so much as it allows us to 'measure' what it is unions do or have done, but what this process neglects is the type of legacies these disputes produce. My work looks to explore the more 'qualitative' legacies of these disputes through poems that can be seen as questioning these received narratives and histories.

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In terms of post-war mining and the bigger industrial disputes of the late twentieth century, it was not until 1972 that another national coal strike was called with miners looking for a significant pay rise. This time the strike was called in the middle of winter (9th January 1972), so that 'the lack of coal bit quickly', and with there being only 'enough coal to last eight weeks' the strike had momentum from the start (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 23). While only 58.8% of miners originally voted to go on strike—just exceeding the 55% required—when it was called, 'not a single miner broke the strike. No one ever shouted "scab", for there was no one to shout it at' (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 23). It took the miners only a month to bring Britain to a halt: on the 9th February Prime Minister Edward Heath was forced to declare a 'state of emergency', with the 3-day working week following two days later. The strike was finally called off two

⁴ Phillips' 1974 book *General Strike* and Clegg's 1988 *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889: 1911- 133*, Volume 2.

weeks after (on 25th February) with the miners agreeing to a wage increase of between £5 to £6, plus other benefits ('1972: Miners Call Off Crippling Coal Strike' 2015).

However, this agreement was only a temporary fix in mining/government relations. On 1st February 1974—with Arthur Scargill now on the National Union of Miners' (NUM) National Executive Committee, President of the Yorkshire Miners and pushing for industrial action—81% of miners voted for strike action and Britain's miners were on strike again. This time things moved more swiftly. With the strike starting on the 9th February, Heath called a snap election for the 25th of the month on the issue of 'who ran the country' and, this time, immediately declared a state of emergency: reintroducing the three-day working week he had instituted in 1972; banning shops and offices from using electricity in the evening; forcing television channels to stop broadcasting, with programmes running 'no later than 10.30pm' (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 26). This proved to be fruitless, and with Heath's subsequent defeat by Labour in the 1974 elections, the miners' union had effectively toppled the incumbent government, and through the work of the new Harold Wilson Labour government the strike was brought to a timely conclusion.

After the Second World War, trade union numbers continued to grow. Yet, the attitudes towards women and BAME workers, and their grievances, from the trade union movement remained regressive. Nicole Busby and Rebecca Zahn, in their essay 'Women's Labour and Trade Unionism', quote from the Trades Union Congress' annual report from 1948 which states:

There is little doubt in the minds of the General Council that the home is one of the most important spheres for a woman worker and that it would be doing a great injury to the life of the nation if women were persuaded or forced to neglect their domestic duties in order to enter industry particularly where there are young children to cater for.

(2015)

While the number of women who were members of a trade union continued to increase, and today women make up the majority of the trade union membership—approximately 3.4 million women to 2.8 million men (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills 2017, 24)—the trade union movement has historically not shown a great consideration for the specific needs of women. While women 'are often in industries with a high rate of turnover', with such industries 'noted for difficulty in organizing and militancy', it was the 1968 Ford Sewing Machinists' Strike and their campaign for equal pay, later recounted in the film *Made in Dagenham*, that led to the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970. However, even when, in 1975, a 'Working Women's Charter, listing aims such as day centres, abortion, and family allowances, was debated at the 1975 TUC Congress', it was voted down by 'a card vote of 6,224,000 to

3,697,000 because many felt its provisions were outside the functions of the Congress' (Soldon 1985, 27). These issues are something that the poems themselves fail to address. There is a strain of masculinity that runs through the trade union movement that also informs the poems in this thesis. The narrative of unions is still a masculine one.

Similarly, the struggles experienced by BAME workers are often sidelined in trade union narratives. The increase in the number of immigrants to the UK's workforce in the post-war years, particularly those from the Commonwealth and those countries that had only recently extricated themselves from colonial rule, was beginning to change the face of employment in the UK. This change was something the union movement was not necessarily quick to recognise or welcome. Ron Ramdin's groundbreaking 1987 book *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* talks of the Courtaulds Red Scar Mill in Preston where a strike was called 'over management's decision to force Asian workers to man more machines for proportionately less pay' (2017, 269).⁵ The strike was to end in defeat. The Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) Chairman at the factory, Richard Roberts, called the strike 'unofficial' and 'racial'. As a result, the immigrant workers, although supported by the Indian Workers Association amongst others, 'failed to win against their oppressive employers, because of lack of union support' (Ramdin 2017, 271). In the instance of the 1974 Imperial typewriters' strike, the focus on recruiting Asian workers after 1968 had contributed to a turnover in 1972 more than treble that of 1968. Yet, by 1974 bonuses were being re-negotiated downwards, and 'to further reduce labour costs, more women were employed', as 'Asian women workers were regarded by the multinational employers as passive' (Ramdin 2017, 273). When the workers reached out to their union—the TGWU, and its negotiator George Bromley—they were harshly rebuked. Bromley wrote to the strikers saying: 'You are ill-led and have done nothing but harm to the company, the union and yourselves' (Dhondy in Ramdin 2017, 273). The TGWU never made the strike legal. Most of the strikers were sacked and the trade union movement stayed largely silent on the whole matter.

⁵The title is a response to E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* which, Ramdin felt, 'had entirely overlooked the presence and contribution of Black leaders who were prominent in English working-class struggles' (2017, xii)

In the preface to the book, Ramdin makes clear how he is using the terms 'black' and 'working class' in the work:

In general, 'black' refers to non-white persons, particularly those from former colonial and Commonwealth countries. Within this usage, there are sub-divisions denoting the various constituent groups: these are Africans, Asians, West Indians, Afro-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, Asian-Caribbeans and Black British. 'Working class' refers essentially to those unskilled and semi-skilled Blacks who came to Britain through the period, but particularly during the heavy post-war immigration in search of jobs.

(2017, x)

The most momentous of the strikes involving BAME workers was the 1976-78 Grunwick dispute. On 20th August 1976, a group of workers from the mail-order department, comprised mainly of South Asian women and students from East Africa, walked out of the Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories in Willesden, London. The strike, which would last almost two years, would prove to be one of the most militant in British history and would result in 550 arrests, more than any dispute since the 1926 General Strike (Ramdin 2017, 280). In the mail-order section, workers could expect compulsory overtime, unrealistic targets and, through the summer months, stifling heat. Four men originally walked out and crucially stayed by the gate, forming, in effect, an unintentional picket line. The men were later joined by the woman who would become the strike's 'leader', Jayaben Desai, and her son, Sunil (Ramdin 2017, 285). The workers, without union recognition at the time, turned to APEX (Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff). On 24th August, 'the initial sixty or so Grunwick workers completed their membership forms and were officially enrolled' in the union; by 31st August 'the number of strikers was 137 [...] out of a total workforce of about 490' (Rogaly 1977, 17 & 19). Unlike the strikes at Red Scar and Imperial, the Grunwick strike had connected itself to Britain's labour movement and from that moment

the Brent Trades Council, APEX, the TUC, and indeed the Labour Government felt honour-bound to use all the considerable powers at their disposal in an effort to win recognition for APEX at Grunwick and reinstatement for the workers who had walked out and who were sent notices of dismissal on 2 September.

(Rogaly 1977, 19)

The unions backed the workers. With the strike approaching the year mark the Grunwick Strike Committee called for a 'day of action', and 20,000 people and trade unionists, including the Yorkshire miners led by Arthur Scargill, marched through the town. As with so many of the labour disputes mentioned here, the Grunwick strike ended without victory for the workers. The support from APEX and UPW (Union of Post Office Workers) began to falter (Ramdin 2017, 302-303). The government's Scarman Report on the dispute was published at the end of August. While the report condemned mass picketing, it called for reinstatement of workers, the individual right for the workers to be represented by a union, recognition of a union for the purposes of collective bargaining and a vague recommendation for law reform (Secretary of State for Employment 1977, 23-24). George Ward, the owner of the Grunwick

laboratories, replied to the report in his 'Counter Scarman Report', published in *The Times* and *The Telegraph*, saying:

Never under any circumstances will the company reinstate those who were, very properly, dismissed. The suggestion is completely impracticable as the existing reinstatement would be a surrender to rampant illegality, brute force, and the coercive power of a mighty vested interest that seeks not to reason but to compel.

(Ward in Ramdin 2017, 304)

In short, Ward simply rejected the proposals of the report. There were to be a few final, and occasionally violent, pushes before the dispute's end. On 7th November, 8,000 people turned out to protest and, after clashes with police, '243 pickets were treated for injuries, 12 had broken bones and 113 were arrested' (Bell and Mahmood). With union support all but removed at this point, on 21st November, Jayaben Desai, along with three others, went on hunger-strike outside of the TUC offices in London. A call to renew the mass picketing in April 1978 failed, and the strike officially ended on July 14th 1978 in defeat and with something of a whimper. Although it ended in defeat, as Ramdin states, trade unionists 'saw the Grunwick struggle as being symbolic of the fundamental right of a worker to belong to a trade union' (2017, 308).⁷ Yet, in the Grunwick struggle this 'right' was shown to be anything but secure. The trade union movement had represented itself better than in the Courtaulds and Red Scar strikes, but it had ultimately failed to support its workers through to the end of the struggle. Grunwick was hugely significant in that it was the first major strike orchestrated by workers from outside the traditional (white working class) union base. However, union narratives often omit Grunwick and trace a direct line between the 1974 miners' strike and the miners' dispute of 1984-5, as do the poets in this thesis. As Ramdin says, the strike was 'symbolic'. Symbolism is insufficient to merit a strike's inclusion into union narratives that privilege working days lost and public and political disruption as markers of 'importance'.

It was unions who were again to play a pivotal role in the 1979 elections – this time bringing about the downfall of the Labour government. Prime Minister James Callaghan, who had succeeded Harold Wilson in 1976, was unable to appease the public-sector unions over their requests for increased wages, leading to what the newspapers called the 'Winter of Discontent'. The 'huge public sector strikes of the winter of 1978-9' which followed were 'fatal' to Callaghan's electoral prospects. The result was a win for a Thatcher-headed Conservative-government 'far more radical' than Britain had ever known (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 26). A Conservative government who were, according to Seamus Milne, now Director of

Strategy for the Labour Party, in his book *The Enemy Within*:

determined to break the back of the entire trade-union movement. The NUM was not the only powerful union in the establishment's sights - the giant Transport and General Workers' Union, with its hold on the docks and road transport, for example was also singled out for special treatment during the Thatcher years. But the NUM's unique industrial position, its unmatched radicalization, and the Conservative Party's spectacular humbling at the miners' hands left little question as to which union would become the new government's most important target.

(2014, 7)

Through the 1980s, the Thatcher government was successful in radically reducing the membership numbers of trade-union organisations from 12.6 million in 1980 to 9.8 million by 1990; the NUM and the miners faced a government that would actively attempt to eradicate both them and their industry over the course of the next decade.

Over the next few years, Thatcher's government spent billions of pounds on improving Britain's nuclear power capacities, as well as increasing coal imports with the aim of unseating 'King Coal' in a Britain where roughly 80% of 'electricity was generated from domestic coal' (Milne 2014, 9). The government built up stocks of domestic coal, introduced 'dual coal-oil firing at all power stations', withdrew 'social security benefits from strikers' families' and created a 'large, mobile squad of police' (Milne 2014, 9). By the time the strike was finally called by Arthur Scargill in March 1984—after the National Coal Board Chairman Ian MacGregor had informed 'the unions nationally of plans to cut four million tonnes of capacity and make 20,000 men redundant' (Beckett & Hencke 2009, 47)—the Tories were more prepared to fight the NUM than they had been in 1972 and 1974. It was estimated that to win the miners 'would have had to stay on strike for a minimum of eighteen months' (McSmith 2011, 159). In the end they managed a year: a year that proved to be singular in its brutality. Documents released by the National Archives and published by the *Guardian* newspaper show that at a meeting with backbench Conservative MPs, Margaret Thatcher compared the 'battle' with the miners to Britain's war over the Falklands/Malvinas island in 1982, declaring:

We had to fight the enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is much more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty.

(Thatcher in Travis 2013)⁶

⁶ This was not the first time the trade union movement had been referred to as 'the junta'. In their 1920 book *The History of Trade Unionism 1666-1920*, Sidney and Beatrice Webb called the unions that appointed full-time General Secretaries—the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Carpenters, Iron-Founders, Bricklayers and Shoemakers—'the junta' (Webb & Webb 2003, 233; Frow & Frow 1971, xii).

Margaret Thatcher's callous equation of the striking miners with the Argentine junta shows both the enormity of the threat she believed the miners posed her (and her government) and also the lengths to which she would go to quash any strike; by the end of the strike on 3rd March 1985 the NUM 'put the overall death total at 11, along with 7,000 injured, 11,000 miners arrested and 1,000 miners sacked for their part in the strike' (McSmith 2011, 162). Not only did Thatcher crush the strike, but she also crushed the mining industry in Britain:

in 1983 there were around 174 operational deep-mine pits in the UK, employing a total workforce of over 230,000 people. At the time of writing, Spring 2013 [...] there are now just three [...] employing barely 2000 miners.

(Paterson 2014, 11)

Today there are no deep-pit mines left in the UK. Deep-pit mining in the UK came to an end on 18th December 2015, when the Kellingley pit closed. Paterson's quotation has an air of nostalgia that is not so present in the poems, at least in regards to the work of the miners. In 'Arthur Scargill', Ely writes of miners and their 'crushed torsos' and 'blood-streaked phlegm' (2013, 71). There is no nostalgia for the punishing work of mining, but there is for the perceived security and sense of community that it provided—'health and Palma de Mallorca / Cortinas on the drive and kids in college' (Ely 2013, 71). These were jobs that were supposed to last forever.

The strike of 1984-5 differed from the strikes of the previous decade as they were not driven by disputes regarding pay and conditions, 'but about pit closures, unemployment and the survival of mining communities under widely varying degrees of threat' (Milne 2014, 17). These were communities which relied on and were inextricably linked to an industry that was in the process of being dismantled.⁷ But why fight for an industry and a job that to most people would appear almost inhuman in its hardship? Interviewed in Owen Jones' book *Chavs*, ex-Miner Adrian Gilfoyle highlights what was truly at stake:

The strike were [*sic*] important because of saving jobs [...] I've got two lads—obviously I wouldn't have wanted them to go down the pit if they could get another job, but at least, when they grew up, there was that opportunity if there weren't any other jobs, to go there, and it was a good apprenticeship. It was worth fighting for.

(2012, 56)

⁷ These post-mining and post-industrial communities are the focus of Chapter Four.

Gilfoyle shows the strike to be one not just of conserving the present, but also of preserving the future for working-class communities and individuals. Although mining is seen as a 'fallback', it had provided stability, the ability to acquire a trade and respect, through an industry that Britain depended upon to keep it running, all of which were taken away.

'Official' trade union histories in the UK, again, are quiet on the period after the end of the miners' strike 1984-5.⁸ Perhaps this is to be expected, since trade-union membership figures decrease almost continually from the end of the strike to the present day. One of the most notable strikes of the period was the Wapping print workers dispute in 1986-7 in which roughly 5,500 workers from Rupert Murdoch's newspaper printing plants went on strike. Murdoch, owner of the News International company which included *The Times*, *The Sun* and other newspapers, shifted newspaper production to a new, modern printing facility in Wapping. Along with the move, Murdoch 'said the company would be reducing the workforce in half a year from 5,500 to 1,500' (Littleton 1992, 76). Murdoch was successful. After the defeat of the miners only a few years earlier, this proved another blow to the trade union movement. Murdoch enjoyed almost complete support from the Thatcher government because, 'as in the defeat of the miners, Thatcher saw Wapping not as a dispute between employer and employee but a battle between the state and the unions' (Brown 2016). Murdoch essentially lured the unions and workers into a trap. In advance of the strike being called, Murdoch's solicitor, Geoffrey Richards, sent a letter to Murdoch headed 'Strike Dismissals' which 'fully outlined News International's legal advantages if Murdoch were to dismiss his Fleet Street workforce during an industrial dispute' (Littleton 1992, 71). What Richard wrote was that 'if a moment came when it was necessary to dispense with the present workforce [...] the cheapest way of doing so would be to dismiss employees while participating in a strike or other industrial action' (Richards in Littleton 1992, 71).⁹ The strike played into Murdoch's desire to reduce his workforce and remove the unions from his organisation. Murdoch successfully moved his

⁸ As in footnote 3 of this chapter, for the period 1984-present, the Office for National Statistics only includes the 2011 public sector strikes in their history of strikes in the UK ('The History of Strikes in the UK' 2015).

⁹ The reasons Richards gave for dismissing employees who were on strike were:

- a) [the employee] will (almost certainly) be in repudiatory breach of contract, and can thus be dismissed instantly;
- b) [the employee] is not entitled to redundancy payment, unless under statutory notice of redundancy before the strike began;
- c) [the employee] will have no claim in unfair dismissal, provided all strikers have been dismissed and none selectively re-engaged; and
- d) The only question will be was the [individual] on strike: i.e. did the dismissal coincide with the strike? The employer does not have to prove a reason for dismissal.

(Richards in Littleton 1992, 71)

printing operations from Fleet Street to Wapping and reduced his workforce at the expense of the workers and their union. As a result, 'employers throughout Britain [were] given a boost in managerial confidence by Murdoch's victory' and the Conservatives were given 'an impetus for pursuing further legislative labour reform' (Littleton 1992, 131). The dispute exposed the unions' relative lack of power and the collusion between the media and the government. Perhaps of even greater consequence was the damage to the public perception of the power the unions held.

Since 2000, much of the larger-scale strike action has been called as a result of below inflation wage increases or pension reforms that would leave workers with less income at retirement. Yet, the public and media perception of these strikes has rarely been positive, with unions having come to be viewed as, at best, unnecessarily disruptive or, at worst, an irrelevance. The end of 2002 saw the first firefighters' dispute since the 1970s, a dispute that arose after local authorities offered a 4% pay rise in response to the Fire Brigades Union's call for a 39% increase in wages. With the military stepping in to provide essential services, the strike finally fizzled out in June 2003—'the public, firefighters, employers and government seemed fed up with the dispute and the agenda had started to move on to bigger stories—Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein' (Wright 2012). The firefighters finally agreed to a 16% pay increase over three years. In 2007, the main postal union, the Communication Workers Union, walked out its 130,000 members over job security fears and modernisation plans. 2011 brought public-sector strikes over changes to pensions. Unions estimated that two million public sector workers went on strike—even though the Prime Minister, David Cameron, disputed these numbers and called the strike 'a damp squib' ('Strike Is A Damp Squib - Cameron' 2011). During the strike, 62% of England's state schools were shut, while in Scotland only 33 of the 2,700 state schools remained open, and thousands of NHS operations were cancelled or postponed ('Public Sector Strike Rallies Held Across UK' 2011). Yet, a YouGov poll carried out in June 2011, a few months before the strikes, found that only 40% of respondents supported teachers going on strike over pensions, while a similar 38% supported civil servants striking (Moran & Thompson 2011). On a smaller scale, the 2015 tube drivers' strike brought parts of London to a halt over plans to introduce a night underground service, with pictures of thousands of commuters queuing for buses giving the strike a unique visual presence. This strike action from a number of the country's foremost public services demonstrates a labour force whose livelihoods are under threat. It shows a union movement still integral to defending the basic rights and conditions of workers, but a union movement that is no longer connecting with large swathes of the population. For many, strikes are not viewed as the last resort of a desperate workforce, but as an inconvenience to those who no longer see the benefit of collective action and union organisations.

This brings us towards the present and the 2016 Trade Union Act. While the number of days lost through strike action and trade-union membership numbers continue to decrease, the passing of the Trade Union Act 2016 demonstrated that for those in government, and specifically the Conservative Party, unions were still organisations whose potential to mobilise a populace was to be feared and was in need of curbing. The government's press release for the passing of the Act said that, with its introduction, 'people will be protected from undemocratic industrial action' and that these 'modernising reforms' would 'ensure strikes can only go ahead as a result of a clear and positive democratic mandate from union members: upholding the ability to strike while reducing disruption to millions of people' ('Trade Union Act Becomes Law' 2016). Although the government has framed the Trade Union Act in terms of protection of the 'people', what this is, in actuality, is a significant restriction of people's protections and their ability to use one of the final bargaining chips that workers possess: the right to strike. The Act introduced a 50% turnout threshold requirement so that at least half of those entitled to vote must do so for any union action to be lawful. In 'important public services' the restrictions were even more binding in that 40% of all those who were entitled to vote must vote 'yes' to industrial action.¹⁰ If teachers wished to go on strike, yet they managed to gain a ballot turnout of only 50%, 80% of those members would have to have voted 'yes' to industrial action for it to take place. In the recent referendum on leaving the EU, of the 46.5 million people eligible to vote, the voter turnout was 72.2%.¹¹ With 17.4 million of the public voting to leave the EU, this meant that only 37.4% of eligible voters cast their ballot for 'leave'. Were the same thresholds applied to the EU referendum vote as the government's trade union legislation for workers in 'important public services', the vote to leave the European Union would have been considered void, on account of failing to reach the 40% overall minimum required ('EU Referendum Results' 2016). So, why is it that we hold our trade unions to a standard that we simply do not in other areas of governance?¹²

¹⁰ The 'important public services' outlined by the Act are: '(a) health services; (b) education of those aged under 17; (c) fire services; (d) transport services; (e) decommissioning of nuclear installations and management of radioactive waste and spent fuel; (f) border security' (*Trade Union Act 2016*, c.15, 2).

¹¹ By law, trade unions must conduct ballots by post, and are the only institutions that must do so in the UK. The Trade Union Act did include an independent review into e-voting, which was carried out by Sir Ken Knight, who was previously Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser for England. Knight suggested, rather noncommittally, in the review that:

Owing to the number of unanswered questions surrounding e-balloting I am not persuaded that e-balloting for industrial action ballots can be introduced immediately. Instead I recommend that a test of e-balloting on non-statutory ballots is necessary as a preliminary step and that this would potentially be the basis for the Secretary of State to decide the matter.

(2017, 56)

¹² Even if ballots to strike were successful, unions must now give two weeks' notice in advance of industrial action, as opposed to the one week that was previously necessary. Again, while not immediately contentious, this

To me, the answer lies in a sense of collective power. In a UK in which neo-liberal ideas, and the competitive individualism that they bring, are still the driving force in our politics, the idea of a trade union is a powerful one. In an article in *The Telegraph* from 2017, Kate McCann claims that Labour 'would take the UK back to the 1970s' if elected, on account of Labour revealing it would 'enforce the right to trade union membership in every workplace across the country' and would call 'for a return to collective bargaining', perhaps even going so far as to extend the policy so that 'pay deals are set on an industry-wide basis' (McCann 2017). Labour did not win the 2017 general election, yet what is interesting about McCann's article is that the phrase 'strike' is only mentioned once. It is the right to union membership and collective bargaining that is the focus of the piece. It is the fear of a workforce organising as a collective which is at the heart of the article. The Trade Union Act is itself as much about undermining the bonds that unions have with their members (or potential) members as it is about strike action—i.e it strikes at the working class as a community. These union narratives are important because they play into the way we think of ourselves as workers, of the rights that we have, of the conditions we are willing to tolerate and the power we have to change and fight for these things. Readdressing and reexamining these narratives is a step towards reconfiguring our position as workers, as workers who can be active participants in their labour representation.

The kinds of work we do affect how we think about ourselves in the world, the positions we hold within a society. In many instances, work connects us to or disconnects us from the places and spaces which we inhabit. The question 'what do you do?' is second only to 'what's your name?' when we meet people for the first time. Trade unions are not perfect, far from it. However, many of the working provisions and protections that are taken for granted are the result of the efforts and struggles of the trade union movement. This chapter has recounted some of the major union events and disputes of the past century. It is shaped by facts and statistics as one way of telling and understanding our recent union histories. The rest of this thesis focusses on poetry. The poems regarding trade unionism can present to us alternative voices, question and probe prevailing ('official') narratives, and allow us to consider trade unions through a cultural form that is itself often 'outside' mainstream and 'official' narratives. These poems highlight the ways in which our histories are performed and constructed, and the way in which dominant narratives seek (and have come) to control the representations of our industrial legacies. These poems

provision means that workplaces have additional time to prepare for any potential disruption a strike may cause and to implement measures to minimise any actual 'interruption' the strike itself might have. Therefore, when coming to the negotiating table, unions are invariably in a worse position from which to negotiate.

allow for a more 'human', less economically and statistically minded interpretation of events. They perform the fractures in these narratives. They exploit the spaces which dominant narratives seek to obscure. Poetry says that language is contested, that it is part of the 'dispute' itself. Poetry is an interrogation of language. This interrogation encourages us to consider subjects anew, to consider more than linear histories. By questioning the way we write about these narratives, we can question the narratives themselves.

Chapter Two: Unions and not Unions

I restate my desire to follow in the footsteps of my father, the station restates its desire to refuse, I threaten to call in the union, the station says that's my prerogative. I remember that I'm not a member of a union and I hate unions.

- Alan Partridge, *Nomad* (2016)

I. Unions

In regards to 'old industrial' communities, Owen Jones writes in his book, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, that 'the unions, whatever their faults and limitations, had given the workers in these communities strength, solidarity and a sense of power. All of this had sustained a feeling of belonging, of pride in a shared working-class experience' (2011, 48-49). Jones' phrase 'had given' points directly to trade unions as organisations whose ability to supply workers with this 'sense of power' and security is greatly diminished. It is significant that Jones has labelled these groups as 'workers' in 'communities' and not as 'members' of a 'union movement' or part of a 'trade union'. It is this distinction between workers as members of a trade union and workers as individuals that this chapter will explore in regards to how union narratives have been formed.

Let us not forget that to be a worker one does not have to be a member of a trade union (and today that is true for the majority of workers), but that to be a member of a trade union one must be a worker.

Trade unions are organisations that represent a group of workers, historically from the same 'craft'—although this is less the case today in the UK with the formation of larger 'merged' unions such as Unite and Unison—whose primary aim is to protect the interests of its members, or, in certain circumstances, workers more generally.¹ A salient feature of a union is that it is an organisation which workers *voluntarily* join, on the condition of paying a subscription or membership, to be eligible for the benefits which unionisation affords—predominantly centred around working conditions, job security and pay.²

¹ There are some workplaces like the Airbus factory in Broughton, Flintshire, where unions (the two biggest there being Unison and Unite) help negotiate pay deals, and whose benefits are universal throughout the workforce, regardless of union membership; however, there are many places where this collective bargaining is simply not the case.

² Although many unions have historical ties to the Labour Party, and therefore there is an underlying political element to the majority of unions in the UK, the affiliation should not be presumed to extend to all of its members.

This notion of membership and paid membership, as well as the varied interaction of members with their union—it is perfectly possible to be a ‘passive’ member of a trade union—means that any representation of workers as members of a trade union organisation is in danger of oversimplifying the issue. By reducing a worker to a member of an organisation, do we lessen the individual agency of those that constitute the organisation as a whole?

This chapter will focus on what can broadly be seen as three poetic ‘moments’ in regards to trade unions’ presence in UK poetry; the first, with the work of Barry MacSweeney, covering the era post the 1974 miners’ strike; the second examining poetry produced in response to the 1984-5 miners’ strike, specifically the work of Tony Harrison and Sean O’Brien; and the third, which does not come directly out of any major industrial dispute, covering 2010 to 2015, with particular reference to collections by Steve Ely and Helen Mort.

I.I Barry MacSweeney’s *Black Torch* and ‘Black Torch Sunrise’

At this point it seems apt to turn to the first of these poetic moments, Barry MacSweeney’s *Black Torch*. *Black Torch* is composed of a number of ‘sections’. Andrew Duncan has read these sections as: ‘a dedication to Eric Mottram; an account of (probably two) miners’ strikes in 1854 occupying the bulk of the book; a poem about a girl, Pearl, set in the 1950s, a legend, “Melrose to South Shields”, slipped in; “Black Lamp Strike”, a poem about many different seditious and protest activities in around 1817; and a final poem, “Black Torch Sunrise”, set in the present day of 1977, with the poet watching television and talking about politics’ (2013, 64). It is clear that labour and politics are at the heart of this collection—‘nee schools or churches / so miners set up their own’ (MacSweeney 1978, 21). If, as Andrew Duncan states, ‘most textbooks were really histories of the political elite in the south-east’, *Black Torch* with its focus on Northumberland and Durham can be seen as alleviating, or, at the least, starting from, this position of historical ‘silence’ (2013, 72). In MacSweeney’s collection, the history of the North East is intrinsically bound up with labour and trade unions.³

³ Chapter Four deals directly with the legacy of industrial decline in the North-East and how the poets writing after 2010 see this legacy as having been formed.

Black Torch's final poem, 'Black Torch Sunrise', written around 1977-78, opens with a television showing reports of a 'riot' in Paris:

BBC monochrome newsreel flickers
 jerking on small family TV screen -
Sorbonne students hoy parking meters
 paving stones ripped, military phalanx
lowers grinning plexiglass
bodies' confrontation on sensual Paris boulevards
 tolerated hash on Amsterdam cuts down riot-quota

 'our correspondent says there will be no
 repetition of the 1968 near-revolution
 because students have not gained support
 of the French working-class'

Leftists mount insurrection
 neat covert agents ensure safety
 When does 'made payments'
 become 'offered bribes'?
Will the Labour Party uphold the jailing of pickets?
Of course.

- TUC inner cadres make closed door pacts with the Govt
This allows the £
 some relief on the European market
 Bank of England dwarfs
up the lending rate
 affording confidence
 to other dwarfs

(1978, 71)

'Black Torch Sunrise' is the only poem in the volume in which a union organisation is referenced by name. The TUC MacSweeney refers to, or Trades Union Congress, is not technically a trade union itself but a federation representing a large majority of trade union organisations in the UK. Its 'mission' is to 'be a high profile organisation that campaigns successfully for trade union aims and values; assists trade unions to increase membership and effectiveness; cuts out wasteful rivalry; and promotes trade union solidarity' ('About The TUC' 2015).

One of the TUC's main principles is that of the union 'federation':

Just as individual workers benefit by joining together in a union, so unions gain strength by acting together through the TUC. The TUC brings unions together to draw up common policies on issues that matter to people at work.

('About The TUC' 2015)

This 'mission' is not to benefit union members directly, but more broadly to benefit the trade union movement and, as a result, *all* people at work. A trade union increases its ability to serve its members by increasing its membership; simply put, the more people from a particular 'trade' or company who join a trade union, the more 'power' or greater the 'mandate' a union has to affect change in that workplace. What the quotation points to, in terms of 'wasteful rivalry', is that trade unions are competitive in their recruitment of members and in their attempts to advance their own organisation's aims. A union's primary concern is to serve its members, which leads inevitably to competition with unions vying for limited or finite resources and political and public recognition to further programmes which address their own specific trade or workplace issues. The need to promote 'solidarity' underlines the fact that individual trade unions do not exist as a homogenised organisation in relation to all, or even the majority of, union issues.⁴ The need for 'solidarity' ironically reinforces the notion that unions are frequently at odds with one another. However, the reverse is also true: if the TUC aims to 'draw up common policies', it also aims to place all unions on an even footing and treat them as essentially the same, regardless of membership. This is admirable, particularly as an organisation like the TUC is capable of advancing the needs of smaller unions which may not have the resources or numbers of a larger union, in terms of their own membership or influence within their workplace or industry.⁵ Two of the largest unions in the UK, Unite and Unison, are themselves amalgams of a number of smaller unions.⁶ As both Unite and Unison are also members of the TUC, there appears some grounding in the claim from the TUC that 'unions gain strength by acting together'. There are over 130 official trade unions in the UK, particularly focusing on smaller industries or sectors with fewer employees ('Trade Unions: The Current List And

⁴ A BBC news story on the London Tube strikes of August 2015 ran with the headline, 'Tube strike suspended by unions', which although entirely accurate, as there were a number of unions involved in the proposed strike action, furthers the idea that unions act together as a singular entity on issues such as industrial action.

⁵ The three biggest unions in the UK—Unite, 1.42 million members ('About Unite, Britain and Ireland's Biggest Trade Union' 2015) Unison, 1.3 million ('About: Unison 2015), GMB, 632,000 ('Join GMB' 2015)—are all members of the TUC and, combined, account for over 50% of the UK's trade union membership—6.4 million (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills 2015, 5). In terms of the TUC, these three union's percentage is even higher as the TUC does not represent all unions in the UK.

⁶ Unite was initially founded with the merging of Amicus and Transport and General Workers Union (T&G); while Unison was realised through the merging of the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO), the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) and the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE).

Schedule' 2018).⁷ There is still a clear belief that individual industries require their own specific union and union representation. In the main, the larger and broader a union's remit becomes, the less able it is to cater for the specific needs of the people it represents, while, conversely, increasing its ability to affect more wholesale changes in terms of labour relations for their members. In the same way, the more the TUC attempts to 'reduce' the fifty-two unions it represents into a singular labour mass, the less chance the smaller unions have of meeting their own trade-specific needs.

Keeping all that has been said regarding the TUC in mind, the fact that MacSweeney, a union official in the National Union of Journalists (Riley 2013, 137), has only referenced the TUC and not a specific union is a point for exploration. Harriet Tarlo describes *Black Torch* as 'poetry as witness in which close engagement with social history and authentic sources enables the poet to tell the tale of coal and iron' (2013, 25). If we are to accept Tarlo's assertion that MacSweeney was attempting to tell the story of two of Britain's major industries in *Black Torch*, then we might expect the TUC to become the union mouthpiece for these industries and for unions more broadly. The way MacSweeney situates this 'mouthpiece', the TUC, within the poem is troubling:

When does 'made payments'
become 'offered bribes'?
Will the Labour Party uphold the jailing of pickets?
Of course.

- TUC inner cadres make closed door pacts with the Govt
This allows the £
some relief on the European market
(1978, 71)

The TUC serves as the sole 'union' representative in MacSweeney's work. Immediately following the question 'Will the Labour Party uphold the jailing of pickets?', the TUC becomes the explanation for the answer, 'of course'. What MacSweeney is speaking to is the TUC's involvement with the Labour Party's Social Contract. The 'closed door pacts' refer to the Liaison Committee, established in 1972, which brought together the TUC and the Labour Party to work out a 'common programme for action if Labour won the next general election' (Taylor 2000, 209). After Labour's election win in 1974, the Social Contract grew out of the Labour Party's acceptance of trade union power after the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes, in the context of the need to stabilise the British economy. The Social Contract, a policy that ran roughly

⁷ Some of these smaller, more specific, unions include the Welsh Rugby Players Association and the Boot Pharmacists Association.

from 1974-78, 'committed the government to policies the unions wanted - the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, increased spending on welfare benefits, state-imposed restrictions on the prices of essentials - in return for an undertaking from the unions to accept modest pay rises, agreed with the government, which would not worsen the inflation rate and the already perilous economic situation' (Beckett, A. 2009, 291).

Although these aims may seem to show a government actively 'committed' to improving the lot of the working class, the result was that 'wage increases for union members had been consistently at or below the rate of inflation [...] The result was a brutal cut in the standard of living of some of the Labour Party's most natural and loyal supporters' (Beckett, A, 2009, 436).⁸ In the poem, MacSweeney contrasts the plight of individual trade unionists—'the jailing of pickets'—with the behaviour of the 'inner cadre' of the collective TUC. The members are the ones who suffer. The Labour Party and the TUC are accused of betraying the 'rank and file' of the the labour movement. The 'closed door pacts' suggest the TUC is aware of the Labour Party's intentions to jail striking workers, but, more concerning, that this knowledge comes from the TUC's 'liaisons' and 'pacts with the Govt'. Not only are the TUC betraying their members, they are doing so as to protect the '£ [...] on the European market'. It is not industry or jobs being protected, but money, or more specifically, currency. The main beneficiaries of these pacts are not the working class, but the economy and those employed in trade and finance.

The poem opens with the 'BBC'—prior to which we have a dedication to the poet Tom Pickard and an epigraph from Allen Ginsberg's 'Eclogue'.⁹ The BBC and the 'monochrome newsreel' that it produces establish the poem. In the next stanza, the first pronoun is introduced, coming from the BBC's reportage of what 'our correspondent says'. The possessive pronoun 'our' appears to locate the correspondent in the 'possession' of the BBC. There is a question as to the autonomy and agency of what is being reported. The BBC 'owns' the reporter and therefore owns the interpretation of the news and by doing this controls the narrative. The quotation marks come prior to 'our', not after the word 'says'. We are presented with a filtering of information from correspondent to BBC, and then BBC to audience watching the news. The authority exists with the BBC, by their choosing to report what the correspondent has

⁸ 'Between July 1975 and July 1976, the first year of the pay restraint, or "phase one" as it was officially known, average earnings rose 13 per cent and so did inflation. Between July 1976 and July 1977, "phase two", earnings rose 9 per cent while inflation rose twice that' (Beckett 2009, 436).

⁹ Pickard had helped organize a benefit in Newcastle for miners on strike in 1972 which had included MacSweeney as a reader - along with Tony Harrison, whose own relationship to unions will be examined later in this work. Ginsberg's 'Eclogue' is a pastorally-based poem in which the intrusion of the news media into the rural idyll becomes impossible to ignore (Ginsberg 2017).

said, but, by leaving the correspondent as an unnamed source, there is space created in which the correspondent and the BBC can distance themselves from the report if needed. This space allows the parties to disengage themselves from the 'story'. If the narrative were to shift or be reconfigured, the 'responsibility' for the report becomes someone else's. 'Correspondent' attributes a certain journalistic authority, and the implied presence of the reporter at the scene. This results in the claim being made that 'there will be no / repetition of the 1968 near-revolution', whereby the disembodied correspondent is not called upon to validate their claim.¹⁰ MacSweeney's lineation of the verse to read 'repetition of the 1968 near-revolution' speaks to the way in which the issues of 1968 have not been addressed. The circumstances that led to the 1968 'near-revolution' are still present and the responses to it are still the same. The BBC is using the images and narratives of the past to justify the actions of the political present. If the news is a repetition we know how it ends. However, a repetition suggests that it may not end, the same information is supplied on a loop, without change, the narrative never wavering. MacSweeney literally distances the quotation by indenting it and positioning it as its own separate verse; there is space around the claim made, bracketed by the quotation marks which start and conclude it. The narrative from the BBC is protected. It is sealed off from the 'world' that surrounds it.

In a letter to the *New Statesman* in 1979, Richard Francis, then Director of News and Current Affairs at the BBC, wrote that 'the BBC's journalists do indeed find it natural to ask "an important person" - a senior civil servant or government minister, for instance - for they are the people whose decisions largely determine how things will be run in our democracy' (Philo 1982, 138). The letter posits a class assumption (what is 'natural' in any case?), continued by journalists, 'that some people are more important than others and have a greater right to speak' (Philo 1982, 138). As a result of such assumptions, the BBC is complicit in maintaining the social status quo and producing unbalanced reportage. During the reporting of the 1975 British Leyland Motor Corporation's engine tuners' (unofficial) strike in Cowley, Oxfordshire, the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, gave a speech at the outset of the strike referring to 'manifestly avoidable stoppages of production'. Across the three television channels (BBC1, BBC2 and ITN) this came to be presented as strikes being the 'main problem facing the car industry in general and British Leyland Motor Corporation in particular' (Beharrell 1976, 256-7). This view of the dispute came to dominate the news agenda with '42 references (to the strike and Wilson's

¹⁰ Although there were no riots of the scale of the 1968 riots, there were, however, more localised riots in: Garden House, Cambridge (1970); Chapeltown, Leeds (1975); Lewisham, London (1977).

speech) emphasising this interpretation'.¹¹ Compared with the 'dominant' view of the strike, Jack Jones criticising Leyland's management 'received three references on BBC1, none on BBC2 and three on ITN' (Beharrell 1976, 263).¹² Even though these numbers are massively weighted in favour of the government's view of events, these figures can still be, according to Peter Beharrell, overstating 'the actual emphasis given to alternative explanations', as 'information which contradicts the dominant view tends to be discounted, sandwiched or overwhelmed' (1976, 266). In MacSweeney's poem, it is through the correspondent that the claim is made that there 'will be no / repetition of the 1968 near-revolution' (MacSweeney 2003, 74); this becomes the 'state sponsored' viewpoint, it is the line that is to be repeated, it is the story that is to be broadcast.

Taking the assertion that there 'will be no / repetition' in conjunction with the line 'TUC inner cadres make closed door pacts with the Govt', it becomes more difficult to position who is 'speaking' these words or making the claim for their validity. We are never given from whom the 'correspondent' has gleaned this information. MacSweeney had been a union official, and Peter Riley asserts that MacSweeney's work 'had always been political as he knew and understood politics: on the ground, in the workplace' (Riley 2013, 137). The line about the TUC becomes one in which MacSweeney is interrogating the role of the TUC as institution and a poet questioning the claims put forward by a media set on condemning union action. The 'TUC', through the capitalised acronym, becomes visually linked with the 'BBC': a public-service organisation that is still inextricably connected to the state through receiving its funding from the television licence fee. An organisation such as the TUC is 'bound' by certain legislations as to how it can and cannot operate and through its 'pact' with the government it becomes beholden to the government itself. The TUC acts as an intermediary between the government and the trade unions it represents, but the 'pact' is made with the government, the unions are absent. A 'cadre' can be a revolutionary activist, but it is also a group of people trained for a specific purpose or profession. The purpose revealed here is specifically to make deals with a government who continue to jail pickets. MacSweeney is suggesting a revolutionary or activist front to the TUC, but claiming that, in actuality, there is an 'inner' cohort within the TUC who control the dynamic between the unions and the

¹¹ The speech was still being referred to seventeen days after the initial speech was given - '13 times on BBC1, 8 on BBC 2 and 21 times on ITN'. The speech itself (and the news outlets repeating it) essentially helped to 'organise coverage' by continuing a singular strike narrative (Beharrell 1976, 263).

¹² Jack Jones was General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. Furthermore, 'on BBC1 there were 22 references to the strike problem of Leyland, as against 5 references to the problems of management and only 1 to investment. On BBC2 there were 8 references to the strike theme, 3 to management and 2 to investment. On ITN there were 33 to the strike theme, 8 to management and none to investment' (Beharrell 1976, 266).

government. The public narrative may be one of activism, but the private is one of collusion and compromise. There is both a public and a private face to the TUC, in the same way that there are to our news organisations and our political institutions.

While it is to the 'Labour party' that the question as to whether they will 'uphold the jailing of pickets' is directed, it is with the 'Govt' that the TUC makes 'closed door pacts'. The answer to the question posed is, 'of course', but with an ambiguity as to whether this is the response from the Labour party or the poem's speaker. Either way, the perception is that this policy of 'jailing' will continue. Yet, behind these closed doors, the Labour party shift to become the 'Govt'. The abbreviation suggests a familiarity between the TUC and the government, a lack of formality for this 'closed door' meeting. Behind 'closed doors', the TUC is not dealing either with the Labour party or the government, but with some other institution, the 'Govt'. This 'Govt', while composed of members of the Labour party, is not the Labour party. It is a different kind of clandestine group, one that operates outside of the public eye. The TUC makes pacts with the state as an abstract ruling institution, not simply the party in power. Labour may be in government, but the state and its dominance exist outside of this. The nature of 'closed' comes to mean 'restricted', restricted access, restricted membership. As 'restricted', it records the intentional exclusion of the members of the union from the decision-making process. It separates the 'cadres' from the rest. MacSweeney takes the idea of a 'closed shop', an agreement in which employers agree to only hire union workers, and uses it to critique how union members are being excluded from their own labour processes and the decisions made about it.¹³

The following section begins with the lines:

Circles broken circumferences ripped
perimeters buckled
facts revealed
must be published
because they are seditious

(MacSweeney 1978, 71)

The 'closed' pacts from the previous lines have been 'ripped' open from the outside—'Circles broken circumferences ripped / perimeters buckled' (1978, 71). With 'buckled', we are presented with a tension between closing—as in buckling a belt or clothing—and opening under pressure. Yet, the circle of the

¹³ 'Closed shops' were made illegal in the UK under the 1990 Employment Act ('Employment Act 1990').

pact is broken and the 'facts' of the meeting are exposed. These 'facts', the speaker tells us, 'must be published / because they are seditious' (1978, 71). 'They' are the facts and the conflated TUC and the Govt. MacSweeney makes any distinction between the two organisations impossible, the two parties become the 'they' of the poem; their 'pacts' bind them into one unit. The facts to be 'revealed' are 'seditious', but so are the organisations of the TUC and government themselves. It is the TUC and the government who become responsible for the rebellion, not those, introduced in the opening of the next stanza, taking part in the riots; the 'dragged by the hair students' (1978, 71) are a result of the 'pacts' signed by the 'Govt' and 'TUC', not the cause of the TUC's dealings with the government. The facts 'need to be published' because they expose the complicity between the TUC and the government. While these facts have been forced into the open, they are still 'buckled'. There is a warping of the facts and, simultaneously, a closing in, whereby there is an attempt to secure or 'tame' the facts. The amorphous 'they' also comes to include the media more broadly. The media coexists with the TUC and the government. The 'facts' and the issues surrounding them arise out of the cooperation between all three organisations. In these lines, the audience hangs heavily, the exhortation of 'must' does not imply that the facts are necessarily to be published, but that the need for them to be published is essential. It is a 'cry' of futility for a transparency that will never occur. The 'facts' have been revealed, but the poem does not give us to whom. These 'facts' exist within the poem, but there is the suggestion that they will not make it to the news cycle or as far as the wider public. MacSweeney shows the TUC as being both complicit with the media and government in the establishment of these 'official narratives', while also being at the mercy of this dissemination (or failed dissemination) of 'official narratives' and political messages.

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I.II Tony Harrison's 'V.'

The second poetic moment, approximately 1984-89, arises out of the struggle and subsequent failure of the UK miners' strike 1984-5. Of all the poetry which could be seen as having a trade union interest none has been more widely discussed or caused more controversy than Tony Harrison's 'V.' (1985), due to its much repeated four-letter expletives and the filmed version of the poem broadcast on terrestrial UK television in 1987.¹⁴ The 'v.' represents the notions of victory, versus and verses negotiated throughout

¹⁴ On 12th October 1987, *The Daily Mail* published a headline reading 'Four-Letter TV Poem Fury', giving the broadcast a healthy amount of free advertising and situating poetry in the rather unfamiliar setting of the tabloid newspaper. There were to be dozens of articles pertaining to the broadcast in the forthcoming weeks (See: Harrison V). This fall out is covered in the introduction to this thesis.

the 3,500 word poem, but also of a possible simplification of these terms in a single, semiotic signifier. The 'v.' opens up a number meanings between 'versus' as a 'battle' still in progress and 'victory' as some form of satisfactory conclusion to said 'battle'. These are also the 'verses' of poetry. This ambiguity establishes the poem as one of contestation, where what it means to produce poetry and construct narratives is challenged. The full stop after the 'v.' truncates these 'vs', enticing us to try and assign some form of concrete meaning to a letter or symbol that seems intent on refusing it. This abbreviation moderates our access to what the 'v.' represents and, yet, opens up the potential for it to be appropriated by those wishing to affix definite meaning to it. Through the poem's title, Harrison is questioning exactly who and what it is that controls our language choices and narratives, and the extent to which language can be appropriated and moulded to be used both as an inclusive and exclusive tool, depending on which side of the 'v' you are on.

Harrison wrote 'V.' 'in a vandalised cemetery in Leeds during the Miners' Strike' (Harrison 2008, 35). He begins the poem with a quotation from a man who was, at the time, probably Britain's most recognisable Yorkshireman and striker, Arthur Scargill: 'My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master words' (Harrison 2008). Although a dictionary can give the etymology, meaning, part of speech and pronunciation of a word, it can only allow you to 'master *words*', not to master *language*; dictionaries remove language from the the context in which it operates, that which is needed to comprehend its subtler meanings and ambiguities. To 'master' words suggests that words need to be tamed, that they are unruly if let free and that it is only dominion over words that allows them to be used effectively. It is language at its most prescriptive and restricted. By mastering words from a dictionary, there is an act of conformity on the part of the reader; learning words from a dictionary is learning how to 'perform' language in a way an authority figure deems proper. Yet, to subvert something it is essential that you have a working understanding of the original, and the politics and issues associated with it. Scargill quoting his father ties in with the poem's concerns regarding language and parentage, with Harrison going to visit his family's graveyard plot and finding 'UNITED graffitied' on his parents' gravestone (2008, 12). 'United' suggests a common purpose, yet the word exposes multiple forms of separation. There is a physical separation between the writer or narrator (Harrison) and the deceased (his parents), a linguistic ambiguity of the football graffiti of 'UNITED', the concept of union, and the 'union' of his parents in the grave itself.¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm writes that, in Britain

¹⁵ There is something in this idea of Harrison's that seems to conjure up Roland Barthes' assertion from *S/Z*—Barthes' analysis of Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine*—that 'the ultimate horror is not death but that the classification of death and life should be broken off' (1974, 197).

particularly, writers from a working-class background ‘were acutely conscious of the gap between the world of their parents and their own’ (2012, 361). This would have been even more pronounced for Harrison as, coming from a working-class background, he would have been one of the first generations—he was born in 1937—to have benefitted from the 1944 Education Act which made all education free in the UK. The Scargill quotation brings to the fore the idea of generational difference that permeates Harrison’s work.¹⁶ It is not clear as to whether Scargill is following his father’s lead; Scargill quotes what his father does and what his father believes, without venturing his own opinion on the subject. The quotation is presented so that the concerns of generational separation and influence are set beside, and mirrored by, the power that language has. Yet, there is a division between the language we expect, particularly of poetry, and the language and narratives we are presented with. What is interesting in regards to trade unions is that the Scargill epigraph to the poem is included without any biographical explanation as to who Scargill is: what we see is the ‘removal’ of the union organisation from the individual. In the poem, there is only one section in which there is a direct reference to a trade union, and it is, unsurprisingly, that of the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers):

Vs sprayed on the run at such a lick,
the sprayer master of his flourished tool,
get short-armed on the left like that red tick
they never marked his work much with at school.

Half this skinhead’s age but with approval
I helped whitewash a V on a brick wall.
No one clamoured in the press for its removal
or thought the sign, in wartime, rude at all.

These Vs are all the verses of life
from LEEDS v. DERBY, Black/White
and (as I’ve known to my cost) man v. wife,
Communist v. Fascist, Left v. Right,

class v. class as bitter as before,
the unending violence of US and THEM,
personified in 1984
by Coal Board Macgregor and the NUM,

Hindu/Sikh, soul/body, heart v. mind,
East/West, male/female, and the ground
these fixtures are fought out on’s Man, resigned
to hope from his future what his past never found.

(Harrison 2008, 11)

¹⁶ Poems such as ‘Book Ends’, ‘Turns’ ‘Timer’ and ‘Long Distance’ explore Harrison’s relationship with his father and Harrison’s difficulties with his ‘position’ as poet.

The passage shows Harrison bombarding us with choices, conflicts and disputes, all managed through his use of three conjunctions: truncated 'v.', the forward slash ('/') and 'and'. Wojciech Klepuszewski, in his essay on the poem, claims that the 'small "v" becomes the common denominator in the poem [...] and carries a great polysemic weight: behind each of these v's lie problems pivoting around various political, cultural and social issues' (2011, 25). Klepuszewski's claim undoubtedly has merit, especially with the idea of 'pivoting' in regards to the 'v.', but by ignoring the aforementioned conjunctions it has become overly simplified. The letter 'v' is itself both united and divided, its arms extending out from a single unified point. When writing 'something v. something', in the context of a football match, the order of the names shift depending on context and speaker. By the standards of the Football Association, to see 'LEEDS v. DERBY' written down as a fixture would mean that it was Leeds who were playing at home and Derby away. However, when spoken by fans, most would begin with the 'side' where their allegiance resides. The capitalisation of both phrases visually aligns them in the poem. We read 'LEEDS v. DERBY' in the same way as we read 'UNITED' graffitied on the gravestone. The internal 'v.' modulates our relationship to the two sides, immediately putting them into conflict with one another and encouraging us to see this 'conflict' as existing only within this very narrow duality. 'LEEDS v. DERBY' could as easily be read in terms of the 1984-5 miners' strike—when over 97% of Yorkshire miners went on strike, whereas in North Derbyshire only 66.7% went out and in South Derbyshire it was 11% (Richards 1996, 109). These sides are *put* into conflict with one another, the narrative being told is that they are in dispute. What Harrison is speaking to is the concept of 'positionality'. We project or seek out a position, or one is forced upon us, in an attempt to modulate our relationships with groups that are other to what we perceive or consider to be our own. We are told who we should be 'against'. This modulation then becomes one of the forms by which we tell our histories and they come to be constructed.

In positioning the 'v' alongside 'and' and '/', Harrison is not only shifting the nature of each 'conflict', but also leading the reader to consider how we come to be socially positioned and the 'sides' with which we align ourselves. The slash, as it is most commonly understood, functions in the same way as 'or' and projects an idea that the two (or more) categories arranged around them act as mutually exclusive. Yet, it is also a barrier, an unbroken line that one cannot move between. It is as if the slash is necessary, necessary to keep two things separate or to maintain difference that one might fear is being eroded. Those categories that Harrison separates with a '/' initially appear to be those that you are born as or into. These are not conflicts at all, simply closer to a 'delete as appropriate' section of a document. In the poem, there is an implication that we are forced to identify ourselves or others as one of the two options provided. We are only ever given the choice of two, meaning that we are engineered into a position

where the impression of choice is still divided by carefully delineated boundaries, and further, boundaries that have only taken into ‘consideration’ labels imposed from the outside. This is the danger that Harrison appears to be exposing. Where Harrison writes ‘Hindu/Sikh’, our first presumption is that these two presented sides are mutually exclusive, one cannot be both Hindu *and* Sikh.¹⁷ Indeed, in 1985, issues in India had effectively produced a binary of Hindu/Sikh or a ‘Hindu v. Sikh’ position. The ‘Hindu/Sikh’ reference relates to the 1984 Operation Blue Star where Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered the storming of the Golden Temple, occupied by Sikh separatists. This led to her assassination by her own Sikh bodyguards at the end of October 1984—Gandhi was Hindu—and the ‘anti-Sikh riots’ later in 1984, where ‘the Indian government suspended constitutional rights in Punjab and committed gross human rights abuses against tens of thousands of people’ (Hundal 2009).¹⁸ However, what is omitted by Harrison is that it is more common in the UK for people to be neither Hindu nor Sikh—and that many people are not, or do not subscribe to, any of the (other) binaries with which Harrison presents the reader. Yet, by ‘reading’ the forward slash as another form of conflict we counterintuitively bring the two ‘binaries’ into conversation with one another.¹⁹ By ‘being’ in one of these categories you situate yourself within a larger ‘community’, but this categorisation also separates you from numerous other forms of identification. However, by being in conflict with something you become an active participant in the way the ‘other’ group defines itself and self-reflexively how you read yourself in relation to that which is not ‘you’. The narrative of one group becomes inextricably bound with its ‘rival’ or ‘counterpoint’. Harrison is suggesting that as these binaries are presented to us as absolute we come to think of them as such, establishing our narratives of who we are around imposed labels and staged conflicts.

Turning to the trade union aspect of the poem, Harrison positions the NUM around the conjunctive ‘and’:

class v. class as bitter as before,
the unending violence of US and THEM,
personified in 1984
by Coal Board Macgregor and the NUM,
(2008, 11)

¹⁷ This not taking into account that Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak, who was raised in a Hindu family.

¹⁸ Conservative Zac Goldsmith seemingly tried to reactive this division in his 2016 London mayoral campaign (Chakelian 2016).

¹⁹ In his reading of the poem recorded for Channel 4, Tony Harrison does not read aloud the ‘slashes’ in the poem, he simply speaks the two words separated by it—e.g. ‘Hindu Sikh’ (Harrison 2015). In regards to the ‘v’, sometimes Harrison says ‘versus’ and on other occasions simply ‘v’.

In this stanza, the shift from the abstract 'class' to the concrete organisation of 'the NUM', which closes it, points, again, to problems of the positioning. Taking my previous reading of 'LEEDS v. DERBY', the initial implication is to read the first 'class' as the one to which you are nominally aligned. Although both 'classes' are presented identically, they are not. The lack of differentiation between 'class v. class' evokes ideas of a people at war with themselves and echoes journalist and ex-Labour MP Brian Walden's words that the miners' strike of 1984-5 was 'a civil war without guns' ('Miners' Strike 1984-85: "A Civil War Without Guns"' 2004). As Harrison does not use a comma after 'class v. class', in contrast with the other dualities presented, there is an open-endedness to the conflict and the versus is allowed to bleed into the rest of the line and therefore into the wider concerns of the poem. Class becomes the genesis and justification for 'the unending violence' and aggression, equally attributable to both 'sides'—the violence 'justified' by a working class whose jobs are under threat, and a ruling class who are having their economic interests negatively affected by the miners' strike. If the class violence is 'as bitter as before', there is a suggestion that everyone already 'knows' which side they are on, however unclear this appears from the outside. This 'unending violence' is then read as a re-emergence of violence which has gone in some abstract 'before'. This is a story that has been told before, the terms requiring no explanation. Yet, these 'classes' across the 'v' justify one another. The 'v' only exists if there are two sides to the conflict. Each side creates the 'terms' by which the other exists, while requiring the recognition of the the other for its own existence.

Harrison's shift from 'class v. class' to 'US and THEM' and finally to 'Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM' is suggestive of questions around the institutional control of information and the ways in which different institutions or systems are represented. On the page, Harrison's two 'classes' are visually the same, yet readers will naturally align themselves with the one they *think* relates to them. The reader is left with the onus of positioning themselves within the class struggle. The difference between 'US and THEM' is easier to account for: 'US' and 'THEM' being object pronouns, usually used when it is already clear who they are referring to, further point to this conflict being one around which the lines are already drawn. Yet, what 'US' does is remove the burden of having to account for what 'us' actually includes or entails. By speaking to an 'us', there is an implicit belief that there is a shared experience of something that is so obvious or clear that it need not be further elaborated. The 'us' is a fixed position, which, while being made up of a individual people, has a singular voice, a singular social or political position. As a reader, the 'us' becomes whatever we want it to be, or more precisely, whatever we perceive ourselves to be. The poem also speaks outside of itself: all readers become an 'us', through the simple act of reading the

poem. This 'us' takes on a different position depending on the reader's class background and experience. Where do we place our 'us'? We are co-opted into positioning ourselves by engaging with the poem and deciding what it is our 'us' represents. Harrison demonstrates the ease by which our freedom to choose how we are perceived is essentially at the behest of other institutions and the language acts of others. Not only do we not exist outside of the language which we use to present ourselves, but the language that we use can be affixed to us without our consent. In the poem, all these constructions come out of the clash between the two appearances of the word 'class'.²⁰ The two versions of the word are not the same, one has to come first. The 'class' with which you align is the arbitrary matter of the class you are born into.

As Harrison goes on to rhyme 'US and THEM' with 'Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM', any easy acceptance or comprehension of which 'side' we reside on is exploded. Harrison is the most immediate instigator of the 'US'. It is he who is setting the initial limitations or qualifications which constitute 'US'. Harrison has said that he 'was born into an uneducated working-class family in Leeds' and as a result of winning 'one of those scholarships created by the Education Act of 1944' to study at Leeds Grammar School he was 'considered "bright" if nothing else' (2017, 169). The title for his second collection *From the School of Eloquence* (1978) is borrowed from E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). In the collection, Harrison's poem 'Them and [uz]' echoes 'US and THEM', with the order of the pronouns reversed. 'Them and [uz]' focusses its attention on the young Harrison attempting to broaden the vernacular by which poetry can be 'spoken', reinstating his Leeds-accented pronunciation of 'us' as /uz/ rather than the 'correct' Received Pronunciation version, /ʌs/ (Harrison 1995, 34). With this in mind, the 'US' from 'V.' becomes troubled, as Harrison is taking on a linguistic identifier he has already attempted to reject. 'US' cannot simply be viewed as Harrison co-opting the reader into his own worldview. Harrison's uneasiness with his own 'position' becomes more pronounced. Indeed, it can be read as Harrison, the narrator, taking on an identity that Harrison, the poet, feels is being imposed on him. This 'imposition' can be seen in Harrison's rhyming, against what we may believe his 'position/identity' is in the poem, of 'THEM' with 'NUM'.

²⁰ This idea is explored more fully by Louis Althusser and his concept of 'interpellation'. He suggests that 'ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which [he calls] *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!"' (Althusser 2006, 118). Essentially, others are able to affix and transform who 'we' believe ourselves to be, by creating an identity for us.

Harrison is showing through his use of these dualities—‘LEEDS v. DERBY, Black/White’, etcetera—the way in which ‘dominant’ and ‘alternative’ politics and culture are inseparable from one another, regardless of the ways in which they may be oppositional or not. Moreover, the way Harrison has ‘ordered’ the dualities he refers to does not always correspond to the dominant→ alternative arrangement we may expect to find. The poem can be seen as illuminating the inherent difficulties in determining what constitutes part of the hegemony and what can realistically be termed oppositional. Which parts of our narratives are ones that have come to be ‘imposed’ on us by dominant cultural processes and which parts try to question this established order? It is Harrison at all points who is creating this system of control, or perceived control and order, in the work. Trade unions are an interesting case in point, they can occupy multiple positions in the hegemonic structure, as they are effectively ‘allowed’ to exist because of governmental legislation, yet are obviously part of an alternative politics, especially in a modern neoliberal economic system, where working conditions and security of jobs ‘impede’ companies’ drive to make unbridled profit. Unions occupy a position in which they are ‘indebted’ to capitalism for the continuation of the businesses and companies that employ their members, while also fighting for those workers in a system which is set up to exploit them. During 1984-5, the Scargill-headed-NUM undoubtedly came to be seen as ‘oppositional’. Harrison rhymes THEM/NUM in a way which troubles our sense of political affiliation. ‘V.’ is broadly a pro-strike poem and as such the initial presumption would be to have ‘US’ as the mirror of the ‘NUM’.²¹ However, Harrison and most readers of the work are not (and would not have been) members of the NUM, regardless of how they view it as an institution. This mirroring of THEM/NUM shows Harrison to be speaking to the dangers of ‘blind’ associations, by uniformly relating two images or words because of their assumed aesthetic or linguistic relationship. What this association exposes is the way in which our histories come to be constructed for us, and the danger of us constructing our own narratives around these overly simplified groupings. Harrison’s work is attempting to question a strike narrative that is already coming to be seen as ‘absolute’. As a non-NUM-member himself, to Harrison, the NUM are ‘THEM’ and not ‘US’.

As he is writing about ‘Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM’, in regards to the miners’ strike 1984-5, Harrison is framing the strike in terms of the class struggle, whereby the ‘Coal Board’ stands for those who own and control the means of production and the ‘NUM’ represents the labour force behind production. Harrison personifies the Coal Board in the singular figure of Ian MacGregor, yet refers to the

²¹ There is also a possibility that Harrison has simply ‘confused’ the politics of the poem for the sake of the rhyme scheme. Yet, if that were the case, it would point to an interesting question regarding the importance of form versus the ‘message’ of a poem.

collective NUM—even more surprising considering the opening quotation of the poem comes from Arthur Scargill, who is not mentioned again in the work. Harrison is setting the singular drive of the industrialist Macgregor and the Coal Board against the collective struggle of unionised workers.²² As Harrison uses the ‘and’ to connect the two ‘sides’ involved in the strike—leaving out the political parties and figures who were prominent throughout the strike, Thatcher being the most glaring omission—he does so in a fashion whereby the individual and the collective are viewed together. Although these two groups come to define the year, at least in the UK and in terms of our prevailing history of 1984, they are by no means the sum of the year itself. MacGregor is presented as the personification of the Coal Board, in a show of the reductionist nature of discussions surrounding the strike of 1984-5. MacGregor’s own agency is removed by presenting him solely as the figure for the organisation he represents. MacGregor, while the representative of the Coal Board—and defined by it in the poem—does not account for the whole negative campaign against the miners; similarly, to pretend the NUM is simply a collective without any ‘figures’ or hierarchy, is itself a misrepresentation. Having said this, although the NUM is a collective and garnered its power through its membership and representation of workers in an industry that was essential to the running of the UK, it has itself been reduced to an isolated group. Harrison has removed the strike from the realm of ‘miners’ who are on strike to position the strike as being represented not by the people involved but by the institution that organised them. Harrison says that the NUM ‘personified’ class violence in 1984, and here there is an oversimplification about a group that is made up of individual, fee paying, members being treated simply as an abstract representation. The ‘and’ linking ‘Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM’ aligns both bodies as similar corporate structures to be treated almost as equal in their aspirations. What Harrison does is show that societal groupings exist as a cultural product as much as a political one. What is deemed either part of *our* ‘social community’ or not depends on a narrative, which is necessarily unstable, of the power dynamics between the parts that both constitute and antagonise our ‘position’.

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I.III Sean O’Brien’s ‘Summertime’

Although Sean O’Brien would later state that ‘poetry does not court relevance, except to life’s permanent conditions’ (2006, 172), in his 1987 collection, *The Frighteners*, O’Brien has the 1984-5

²² Ian MacGregor was head of the Coal Board during the 1984-5 strike. Having previously worked for British Steel and overseen the cutting of its workforce by over half at the end of the 1970s, it is clear what his objectives were when appointed.

miners' strike as a recurring theme throughout the book: 'Unregistered' concerns itself with the importation of 'coal to break the strike' from the Baltic during the dispute (1987, 23);²³ in 'London Road' the themes of state-organised violence and the 'rule of law' are addressed; while 'Cousin Coat' details the exploitation of the northern working poor. In 'Cousin Coat', O'Brien writes of their being 'no comfort when the strikers all go back / To see which twenty thousand get the sack' (1987, 47). The NUM may have called the strike, but it is the strikers who will lose their jobs. You go on strike as part of a union, but you lose your jobs as a 'striker', as an individual. In this context, I will briefly consider Sean O'Brien's 'Summertime', with its dedication '*for Richard Richardson, Kent NUM*' (18). Even though *The Frighteners* includes a number of poems that are expressly about the miners' strike 1984-5, this is the only reference to a trade union in O'Brien's collection. This dedication is surprising for a number of reasons, the first being that it is unusual to find a 1984-5 strike poem dedicated to a figure other than Arthur Scargill—'the trade union movement's one and only celebrity' (Milne 2014, 28)—and that at the end of the strike Jack Collins was the head of the Kent chapter of the NUM, not Richardson. O'Brien has said that:

Richardson was from [the] Kent NUM, though I don't remember if I ever knew his precise role. He came and spoke to an NUT branch meeting when I was a teacher. He was an inspiring speaker, an older man, white-haired as I seem to recall.

(O'Brien 2016)

The choice of the Kent NUM is interesting, if only coincidental, as a result of the Kent NUM's stance at the strike's close. In March 1985, when the end of the strike appeared inevitable, it was the Kent chapter of the NUM who proposed to continue the strike, which 'was heavily defeated, 170 votes to 19' (Beckett 2009, 218). Jack Collins said of the event that 'the people who have decided to go back to work and leave men on the sidelines, to unload these men, are the traitors of the trade union movement' (Collins in Beckett 2009, 219). O'Brien's decision to include the Kent NUM is politically charged: by specifying a branch of the NUM—a branch whose leader views much of the union as 'traitors' to the miners on strike and the 'trade union movement' as a whole—there is an implicit critique of the wider Union. What O'Brien does (that Harrison does not) is to reinstate the individual within the union narrative (even though Richardson is not mentioned again), and show that the NUM were at least geographically divided and should not be considered (and do not exist) as a homogenous entity. The story of the strike is one that involves individuals, even if they have been sidelined. O'Brien contextualises his poem and his

²³ Surprisingly, considering they were communist states at the time, at Glasson dock, Lancashire, 'coal boats docked on every tide from East Germany and Poland, to be unloaded directly onto lorries queueing at the dock gates' (Winterton 1989, 92).

'reading' of the strike in terms of an individual, 'Richard Richardson', then via location ('Kent') and finally, via a union ('NUM'). However, the poem opens with the line 'the news is old' and the figure of 'Richardson' or the trade union does not appear again:

The news is old. A picket line
Is charged and clubbed by mounted police.
Regrettable. Necessity.
You have to take a balanced view.
That kind of thing can't happen here
And when it does it isn't true.

(O'Brien 1987, 18)

The story of the strike doesn't truly include Richardson. Although O'Brien dedicates the poem to 'Richardson', he is immediately sidelined by the 'official' strike narrative, one in which 'a picket line / is charged and clubbed by mounted police', as it is a '*necessity*' (1987, 18). O'Brien's dedication to Richardson leaves him on the outskirts of the poem, he is part of it, but not an actor in the telling and retelling of the strike narrative. The narrative, as far as O'Brien sees it, is one that is already formed—'the news is old' (1987, 18)—and those involved in the strike are simply left to watch it be retold.

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I.IV Steve Ely's 'Ballad of the Scabs', Irish Blood, English Heart' and 'Inglan is a Bitch'

After the publication of *The Frighteners* in 1987, there are no collections which directly reference a union organisation until Steve Ely's *Englaland*, in early 2015.²⁴ This third 'poetic moment', running from roughly 2012-2015, firmly establishes itself in the territory of 'legacy'.²⁵ The strikes of the 1970s and 1980s are long finished and what we see are poems written in response to, and dealing with the legacy of, those historic strikes. *Englaland* is described in its blurb as 'an unapologetic and paradoxical affirmation of a bloody, bloody-minded and bloody brilliant people. Danish huscarls, Falklands war heroes, pit-village bird-nesters, aging prize-fighters, flying pickets, jihadi suicide-bombers and singing yellowhammers' (2015). In Ely's work, trade unions, strike action and violence underpin poems littered with acronyms from industry and politics. Much of Ely's union focus comes in the book's second movement, 'The Harrowing of the North'. 'The Harrowing of the North' refers to William I's—alternatively known as

²⁴ Ely's first book, *Oswald's Book of Hours* (2013), included a brief biographical note on the jacket which referred to Ely as a 'revolutionary socialist'. However, this was dropped for his following collection, *Englaland* (2015), in favour of listing the award nominations *Oswald's Book of Hours* received.

²⁵ Including Helen Mort's *Division Street*, which will be examined later in this chapter.

William the Conqueror or William the Bastard—Harrying of the North (1069-70), where brutal attempts were made to quell uprisings in the North of England.²⁶ Ely draws a not too subtle parallel between that event and the war against trade unions, and more specifically the NUM, during the miners' strikes of the 1970s and 1980s.

'Ballad of the Scabs', the centerpiece and longest poem of 'The Harrowing of the North', works as a potted history of the NUM, and more broadly the trade union movement, during the 1970s and 80s:

In '72 the NUM
shook the Tory State
closing down the cokeworks
there at Saltney Gate.

The miners' flying pickets
and their comrades in the TUC
showed the power the workers have
when they act in unity.

(Ely 2015, 136)

Ely's opening to the poem grants the NUM the power to destabilise the state. However, through the first two stanzas there is a gradual shift as we see 'the NUM' become 'miners' and then 'workers'. This is one of the common issues when talking about trade unions and strike action: how should we refer to union organisations and how or where do we attribute power? There is a constant tension between the view of unions as homogenous organisations and unions as being comprised of workers who often share the same profession but not necessarily the same views on how their unions should operate.²⁷ The 1972 strike was predominantly about increasing wages for NUM members—albeit in an industry that had already seen hundreds of pit closures at the cost of approximately 430,000 jobs since the late 1950s ('NUM: Historic Speeches' 2015). Yet, Ely chooses to focus on the broader political impact that the 1972 strike had on the 'Tory State'.²⁸ This is an important distinction to make for it situates trade unions in direct opposition to the 'state' rather than, as seen in Harrison, the Coal Board. This is no doubt due, as

²⁶ The title also echoes Christ's 'Harrowing of Hell'.

²⁷ As outlined in the introduction, in 1972, only 58.8% of miners voted to go on strike—just exceeding the 55% required (Beckett 2009, 23).

²⁸ It is perhaps surprising that Ely refers to the 'Tory State', as opposed to simply the 'state'; from 1970-1974 Prime Minister (PM) Edward Heath led a Conservative government, however, from 1964-70 (PM Harold Wilson) and 1974-1979 (Wilson and then James Callaghan) the Labour party held office. By calling the state 'Tory', Ely does not just refer to the elected government at the time, but to an idea that the structure of the state itself is based on Conservative principles and ideas.

least in part, to Ted Heath's calling of a 'state of emergency' on 9th February 1972.²⁹ Ely's distinction elevates the 1972 miners' strike from an industrial dispute between employees and management to a conflict between workers and 'the state'. The union becomes situated as a political organisation, defined by its political, not labour-based, impact. Still, it is through the suppression and withdrawal of their labour—'closing down the cokeworks'—that unions have political efficacy. Yet, the 'state'/'gate' rhyme also speaks to the future closure of the 'cokeworks' by the government. While in 1972, the NUM are able to close 'down the cokeworks', this is only temporary. It is the 'state' who will finally close the 'gate' on the mining industry. Unlike MacSweeney and Harrison, Ely presents the union as 'proactive', even if it is the NUM's ability to organise an absence of 'work', through picketing and strike action, that affords them the greatest political agency. By choosing not to contextualise the 1972 miners' strike, Ely expects a readership already conversant with the dispute. Ely assumes a reader whose 'position' is likely to be one that is pro-union. Given that *England* was published in 2015 and the 1972 strike has largely been ignored in popular culture in favour of the 1984-5 miners' strike, this is unusual.³⁰ As trade union membership numbers began to decline from 1985 (Department for Business 2015), the strike of 1984-5 is often seen as the beginning of trade unions' waning influence in the UK. In the poem's opening, the NUM are not defending their members' jobs or working conditions against the state; in fact the job of mining is not mentioned. The NUM are the 'aggressors' whose main aim appears revolutionary. Through positioning the NUM as the poem's subject, an NUM which destabilises the 'Tory State' without accounting for the reasons behind these actions, Ely presents a union taking action against the state.

Through 'the miners' flying pickets / and their comrades in the TUC' (Ely 2015, 136), the NUM's proactivity is mirrored against the 'TUC', which becomes almost a subsidiary of the NUM in the poem. As the 'comrades' are *in* the TUC and not simply 'the TUC', there is a suggestion of a tension between the organisation and the individuals within it. The TUC as an organisation is not supporting the NUM, but

²⁹ Section 1(1) of the 1920 Emergency Powers Act reads that a state of emergency may be called 'if at any time it appears to His Majesty that any action has been taken or is immediately threatened by any persons or body of persons of such a nature and on so extensive a scale as to be calculated, by interfering with the supply and distribution of food, water, fuel, or light, or with the means of locomotion, to deprive the community, or any substantial portion of the community, of the essentials of life, His Majesty may, by proclamation (hereinafter referred to as a proclamation of emergency), declare that a state of emergency exists' (Emergency Powers Act 1920). The 1964 Emergency Powers Act broadened the scope so that 'the words from "any action" to "so extensive a scale" there shall be substituted the words "there have occurred, or are about to occur, events of such a nature"'. Section 2 of the 1964 Act also allowed the use of the armed forces to engage in any work of 'national importance' during an emergency period (Emergency Powers Act 1964).

³⁰ The movies *Pride*, *Billy Elliot*, and, to a lesser extent, *Brassed Off* (which is set ten years after the strike) all have the 1984-5 strike as a backdrop.

some of the 'workers' in the organisation are.³¹ The TUC was 'not directly involved in any way' in the 1984-5 strike. Scargill, rightly, believed 'that if he allowed the TUC into the conflict he would lose control because the general council would have been far more amenable to seeking a compromise and an early settlement of the dispute' (Taylor 2000, 251). In this verse, the NUM is 'replaced' as we shift from political concerns to more explicitly strike-based actions. While it is unions that call industrial action, it is the members of the unions that must enact the strike, by withholding their labour and manning the picket lines. However, it is still the NUM which closes 'down the cokeworks', not the workers. Where the NUM 'shook' the state and are 'closing down' factories, the miners and 'their comrades' 'show' their power and 'act' in unity. There is a performativity to the actions of the workers in the second stanza of the poem, in support of the activity of the NUM in the opening stanza. As Ely terms this demonstration of unity an 'act', we have the twin ideas of 'performance' and 'action' being presented. This 'act' is one that is required for the presentation of unity that industrial action requires. The workers' actions, their labour, is still the most powerful thing they possess. Having said this, the use of 'when' in 'when they act in unity' troubles this reading by suggesting that this power can only be shown 'when', in some hypothetical future, this 'unity' actually occurs (Ely 2015, 136). Published in 2015, there is a sense that Ely is commenting not just on workers' unity in the early 1970s, but also on the decreasing influence of unions and the lack of collective organisation today. He is suggesting that worker unity in 2015 is nothing more than a utopian ideal. On the other hand, Ely is also serving a reminder of past union strength and arguing for a return to this position of union strength and collective organisation. By refashioning this NUM 'narrative', Ely's work is performing the 'noble history' of the NUM as a way of challenging present day union narratives that seek to denounce unions as an irrelevance.

Ely continues his separation of union and worker in the verses that follow, with the union responsible for political change but workers forced to bear the weight of the repercussions that come from industrial action:

In '74 they finished the job
and forced out Edward Heath
they chipped in from their pay rise
to buy capital a wreath.

The ruling class got nervous
and planned a counter-attack

³¹ In 1972, the TUC's greatest achievement would probably have been the release of the 'Pentonville Five', jailed after the 1972 dock strike— 'shop stewards of the Transport and General Workers' Union, [who] were arrested on the picket line, committed for contempt and put in Pentonville Prison' ('TUC: History Online').

to perpetrate [*sic*] their power
and put the workers on the rack.
(Ely 2015, 136)

The 'they' at first appears to be a continuation of the 'workers' from the previous stanza. However, as the line echoes the opening of the poem, 'they' is amalgamated into both 'workers' and 'NUM', rendering them as inseparable. As a result, the 'job' becomes somewhat ambiguous. There are a number of readings of 'the job': the 'job' is that of forcing Edward Heath from power;³² there are two 'jobs', getting a 'pay rise' and forcing out Heath, both of which are equally important; there is the 'primary' job—'pay rise'—and a resultant effect, the end of Edward Heath's government. It could be argued that these distinctions are unimportant, particularly considering the difficulty in securing the 'they'; however, what these distinctions do is ask questions as to what a union should be *doing*, what they should be *for*, and what is the interaction between 'lay' members and union officials. The simplest reading of the poem is that 'the job' unions do is all of these things, and that what is intentional, and what is not, is inconsequential. Yet, it is necessary to determine when considering how unions are viewed by the general public. For example, according to a 2011 article in *The Telegraph*, it is estimated that nationally 55,000 jobs are reliant on the UK's defence exports (Wilson 2011). While many are opposed to the UK producing and selling arms, as a trade union is your immediate concern to secure existing jobs, regardless of how morally or ethically dubious they may be? Is it to increase job security and wages within the workplace? Or is it to affect public policy in regards to labour legislation and politics? As Alison L. Booth points out in her book, *The Economics of the Trade Union*, 'while we have considerable information about outcomes, and the issues that are bargained over, it is problematic to infer union preferences from this information, since the outcome reflects the preferences and constraints of *both* parties' (1995, 87). Ely attempts to provide an answer when he writes that 'they chipped in from their pay rise / to buy capital a wreath'. There is a certain sense of complacency and naivety suggested in the lines, since the pay rise is both a victory over and a result of 'capital', which is far from dead. Although 'wreath' has connotations surrounding funerals, a 'wreath' can also be used to signify a wedding or simply a decorative adornment. In this reading, the workers and union ('they') become complicit with capital and the 'chipping in' becomes a way of giving thanks, rather than paying last respects. The workers become complicit in a narrative that seeks to exclude them. It is this tension between being separated from and yet a part of the state that plagues trade union organisations. As Stanley Aronowitz

³² In the 1974 miners' strike, 81% of miners voted for strike action, the ballot called by the NUM, and were widely credited with toppling the Heath government after he was forced to hold an election just three weeks after the vote to strike, an election he subsequently lost to Harold Wilson's Labour party (Beckett 2009, 26).

states in his book on American labour unions: 'organized labor is integrated into the prevailing political and economic system; so much so that it not only complies with the law but also lacks an ideology opposed to the prevailing capitalist system' (2014). Aronowitz's judgement, of course, cannot be directly mapped onto British labour relations, since there have been innumerable examples of unions breaking the law.³³ Yet, the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes both complied with UK law and the aim of these strikes was not for workers to remove themselves from a capitalist system, but to be able to function more effectively within it through increased spending power. It is ironic that, in Ely's poem, the first thing the workers do after receiving their pay rise is to feed money back into the state.

In the poem, the state returns to attack the unions during the 1984-5 miners' strike, when attempting to sue Arthur Scargill and the NUM on 'behalf of' the Conservative government, and imprison him for contempt of court:³⁴

Sir Hector Laing stumped up some cash
Lord Hanson stumped up more
they served a writ on Scargill
on the Labour Conference floor,

A firm of Tory lawyers
deployed the state machine
and outlawed Scargill and the NUM
to the silence of the TUC.

See, all those bastards need to win
is Brotherhood to fail
in cringing fear of state assault
of courts and fines and jail.

(Ely 2015, 139)³⁵

The TUC's 'silence' is a concrete example of the factions within the trade union movement. Not only are Scargill and the NUM 'outlawed' in the poem, but Ely 'outlaws' them by giving their line four iambic feet, rather than the established three feet of the stanza's other lines. The TUC becomes more closely aligned,

³³ There are still those who believe that the 1984-5 strike was illegal as the NUM never held a national ballot.

³⁴ In regards to the 1984-5 strike, in a case brought by five miners from Yorkshire and Derbyshire, the High Court found the strike to be unlawful as the strike had been undertaken without a ballot. This was a ruling that Scargill ignored, leading to the writ being served on him, NUM vice-president Mick McGahey, general secretary Peter Heathfield and NUM leaders in Yorkshire and Derbyshire (Rogers 1984, 1).

³⁵ Sir Hector Laing was Director of the Bank of England in 1984 and Lord Hanson was an industrialist who Margaret Thatcher made a peer in 1983.

poetically, with the 'state machine' and the 'Tory lawyers', not the NUM. It is also of note that the end words of 'machine / TUC' do not rhyme. By withholding the expected end-rhyme, the TUC has effectively been 'silenced' by the 'state machine' (or by Ely who sees their voice as unnecessary to tell his labour history) or has chosen to remain silent. Yet, as three-letter acronyms, the 'TUC' and 'NUM' are linked visually and share a phonetic (/ju:/) with one another. The TUC is suspended between the forces of the state and its obligations towards the NUM. Ely is warning us of conflating two things, the TUC and the NUM, which appear alike or are presumed to have the same objectives, but which in reality have a much more complex relationship and power dynamic. The NUM is at the mercy of the 'state'—the idea of 'deploying' the force of the state is indicative of the state as military aggressors that are controlled by the Conservative government—whereas the TUC has the *option* to remain silent. This 'silence' can be seen in light of the opening of the poem. The NUM remove or withhold their labour—'closing down the cokeworks' (Ely 2015, 138)—to have an impact, the TUC withhold their words. It is unsurprising then that in the final twenty-two stanzas of the poem the TUC are not mentioned again, their silence has effectively removed them, at least in the eyes of Ely, from having a role to play in any further history of the miners' dispute.

Unlike the other poets examined, Ely broadens his trade union focus to include two other unions; however, they both appear in the midst of violence. The first appears when Ely is writing about the Northern Irish independence 'troubles' and the latter after the death of the activist Blair Peach.³⁶ In the poem, 'Irish Blood, English Heart', Ely writes:

[...] Mick O'Brien and Kev Malley
of the Parachute Regiment,
Derry, Longdon and Belize;
Dennis Doody of UCATT and the SWP,
'unconditional but critical support',
Patrick Tighe of the NUM
and South Kirkby Miners' Welfare;
Joe Connell of Keble
and the Inns of Court; [...]
(2015, 169)³⁷

³⁶ An official report from the Metropolitan police stated that: 'Blair Peach attended a demonstration against a National Front meeting in Southall on the 23rd April 1979. At about 12.10am on the 24th April he died in hospital. Post mortems later showed he died of a head injury. At the time of his death there was a thorough investigation which stated that fourteen witnesses said they saw a police officer hit Blair Peach and that there is no evidence which shows he received the injury in any other way' (Metropolitan Police 2010).

³⁷ Ely's biographical information on the back cover of *Englaland* tells us he 'lives in the Osgoldcross wapentake in the West Riding of Yorkshire', an area which includes the South Kirkby area referred to in the poem.

Later, in his poem 'Inglan is a Bitch', Ely writes:

[...] facing the cop-shop,
where punk-legend
'that' Billy Johnson emulsioned
THE POLICE KILLED BLAIR
in square letters three foot high.
(He'd intended to paint BLAIR *PEACH*,
but ran out of wall.)
Blair Peach: teacher,
activist, man of letters:
NUT, ANL, SWP.
(2015, 179)

The first poem takes its title from the Morrissey song of the same name in which the singer points to the shared connection between Ireland and England, while denouncing British politics and the crown.³⁸ The second, 'Inglan is a Bitch', takes its title from a Linton Kwesi Johnson song that concerns itself predominantly with the exploitation of manual labour, particularly amongst immigrants.³⁹ Both poems focus on the state's suppression of opposition and have the unions, UCATT (The Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians) and the NUT (National Union of Teachers), situated alongside the Trotskyist, Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and, in the latter case, the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). In the first quotation, both 'Dennis Doody' and 'Patrick Tighe' are defined by their affiliation to a trade union.⁴⁰ What is most interesting is that while 'the study of industrial relations is primarily devoted to the relationship between unions and management' (Abercrombie 1988, 60), in this poem, we have the presentation of the relationship between the individual and their union. Yet, that relationship is determined only insofar as 'Doody' and 'Tighe' are union members, without establishing what their roles or activities within that union were. In the context of a poem called 'Irish Blood, English Heart', it is

³⁸ The song opens with the lines, 'Irish blood, English heart this I'm made of / There is no one on earth I'm afraid of / And no regime can buy or sell me' (Morrissey 2004).

³⁹ The song includes the lyrics: 'W'en dem gi' you di lickle wage packit / Fus dem rab it wid dem big tax rackit / Y'u haffi struggle fi mek en's meet' (Linton Kwesi Johnson 1980).

⁴⁰ Denis Doody—not 'Dennis', as in the poem—was Regional Secretary for the UCAAT Northern Region, having previously been Chair of the National Executive Council for UCAAT and member of the NUM. UCAAT has now merged with Unite. He has never been a member of the SWP. Doody did consider joining Arthur Scargill's SLP (Socialist Labour Party), who is a friend of his. Denis was aware of Ely's work, referencing having seen the poem 'Arthur Scargill' being read by Ely on Youtube, but did not realise that his name appears in Ely's poem (Doody 2016). I've been unable to find any details for Patrick Tighe, although Denis Doody did know him from the NUM and believes he may have passed away (Doody 2016). Patrick Tighe was also the name of an Irish labourer from the Quarrymen's Union who volunteered to fight in Spain in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War (XV International Brigade in Spain 2016). It is unlikely that they are the same person.

impossible not to read the unions Ely cites, and by their association Doody and Tighe, in the light of the struggle for Irish independence.⁴¹ However, Denis Doody has said that he did not campaign on Irish independence—although he does hold dual nationality and said he sold ‘every paper going’ as part of his raising money during the miners’ strike 1984-5 (Doody 2016).⁴² However, in email correspondence, Ely said that he had met the ‘Dennis Doody’ he writes of in the poem at an ‘SWP public meeting in South Elmsall in the early 1990s’:

What struck me about him was his strong Republicanism and, as I recall, his dissent from the official party line of ‘unconditional but critical support’ of the IRA - [Doody] wasn’t keen on the ‘critical’ bit.

(Ely 2016)

I have not been able to determine if the two Denis/Dennis Doodys are the same person or not. The idea of ‘unconditional but critical support’ can be attributed to the SWP, or more specifically to an article in the *Socialist Worker* from February 1972 ('Marxism And Terrorism' 2006).⁴³ Yet, in the poem these words become (perhaps accidentally) Doody’s words as much as the words of the SWP. Ely has said that

the point of the poem is to undermine imperial concepts of ‘Great Britain’ by affirming and celebrating the Irish struggle for independence whilst at the same time pointing out the paradox is that there is a huge streak of Irishness in the English - and has been for over a thousand years.

(2016)

Through the inclusion of the unions, along with the ‘Parachute Regiment’ and the ‘Inns of Court’, Ely is showing this ‘streak of Irishness’ and how it has come to occupy many of our most influential ‘British’ institutions. The inclusion of unions means that they can be viewed as organisations that allow ‘alternative’ voices to be heard and disseminated, whether we agree with them or not, and exist in a particular intersection between organisational politics and independent activism. Ely’s naming of Doody and Tighe, alongside their union affiliation is essentially synecdochal, refiguring the individual Doody and

⁴¹ The poem also includes the (misattributed) quotation from Irish-born Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, ‘*just because a man is born in a stable, / it doesn’t make him a horse*’ (Ely 2015, 165). Wellesley is saying that the ‘accident’ of his birth does not mean he is Irish. Ely is commenting on the way in which the history of England is suffused with Irishness.

⁴² The union UCAAT spoke out against the IRA after the bombings in Warrington in 1993 ('UCATT Pleads for Peace in Ulster' 1993).

⁴³ This stance was reaffirmed in the paper when Brian Hanley wrote that ‘Socialists stand on the same side as the IRA in opposing the British army and partition. But this does not mean that we agree with either their politics or their tactics’ (Hanley 1991, 6).

Tighe as 'UCATT' and the 'NUM', which allows them the political 'authority' to speak on issues not generally pertaining to the union itself. The individual can say things that the organisation can not.

'Inglan is a Bitch', the poem in which Blair Peach is referenced, could be seen as operating in a similar way. Blair Peach was a teacher who was killed by a Special Patrol Group (SPG) police officer while demonstrating against the National Front in 1979. In Ely's poem, the reaction to Peach's death—'Billy Johnson emulsioned / THE POLICE KILLED BLAIR / in square letters three foot high' (2015, 179)—precedes the 'obituary' for the man himself, 'Blair Peach: teacher, / activist, man of letters: / NUT, ANL, SWP' (2015, 179). As I mention in the introduction, Ely stated that after leaving party politics in 1996 he 'became politically quiescent', commenting that 'I don't count simply 'having opinions', even on social media (or in poems), as being politically engaged — you've got to join, campaign, organise, commit, sacrifice' (Pugh & Ely 2015). Blair Peach seems to embody the 'political engagement' to which Ely is referring. Acronyms necessitate a common vernacular through which to read them, but here it is spelled out for us. In the poem, we are given a 'key' by which to read the acronyms, with 'teacher' reflected in the NUT (National Union of Teachers); 'activist' with ANL (Anti-Nazi League) and, if we are to continue with these counterpoints, 'man of letters' with SWP (Socialist Workers Party).⁴⁴ The key 'unlocks' the acronyms, it explains them to us. The idea being that without understanding the individual—Peach—we are unable to understand the organisations of which he was a part.⁴⁵ Ely is suggesting that while Peach may have been a 'teacher' and 'activist', to simply 'say' or 'write' these things is not engagement enough. It is through the organisational structures that he was a part of—the union, the campaigning group, the political party—that these labels come to have a broader significance and importance. It is through the individual's relationship with institutions that he or she can have a greater political agency. To be a teacher defines you by your labour, but to be part of a union situates you as an agent within the history of the labour movement. In this instance, Peach being a 'man of letters', through the organisations of which he was a part, means that his death becomes situated in a much larger social movement, a movement which is presented as larger than the individual. Yet, it is the *individual* to whom 'eight thousand Sikhs / Paid their respects' (Ely 2015, 179), not the organisations of which he was a member. As in 'Irish Blood, English Heart', the individual's organisational position is not what is important. The individual is required as a figure on which to 'affix' a wider, more inclusive (or subversive), public message than the organisation wishes or is able to disseminate. In the poems, 'Dennis

⁴⁴ I have found nothing to confirm nor deny whether Blair Peach actually did write and so could be considered a 'man of letters' in that regard.

⁴⁵ There is also a suggestion that these organisations require 'unlocking' as they do not command the same public profile or recognition that they once did.

Doody' and 'Blair Peach' are given 'validation' by their membership of a trade union and, reciprocally, the unions in the poem are given a 'face' through which, and a figure about which, to speak.

At the poem's close, Ely returns to the use of acronyms: 'NF, BM. Column 88. / Elland Road was like a Klan Rally' (2015, 180). The groups—National Front, British Movement and Column 88—all espouse fascist and neo-nazi politics. The key we are given to read these acronyms comes after, through another hate-group, the Ku Klux Klan. There are no individuals, simply faceless organisations.⁴⁶ While the acronyms visually align the 'NF, BM [and] Column 88' with the 'NUT, ANL, SWP', Ely questions such lazy associations. These acronyms demonstrate the ways in which our politics and narratives become reduced to a series of 'signifiers' removed from their meaning. Yet, it must be acknowledged that in the poems 'Irish Blood, English Heart' and 'Inglan is a Bitch', UCAAT, the NUM and the NUT are not defined or presented in terms of their relationship to labour itself, but in their relationship to state violence and hate groups. The narrative that Ely presents situates the union as both 'victim' and bulwark to statal oppression and extremism.



Figure 2. *Division Street* Cover

II. Not Unions

To conclude this chapter, I will focus on the word that within trade union circles is the most offensive of all, 'scab'. For this, I take my lead from Sheffield's Helen Mort, whose *Division Street* was published in 2013. By focusing on the phrase 'scab', and Mort's poem of the same name, I wish to explore how trade unions have come to be sidelined within some strike narratives.

The cover art for *Division Street* is a photograph of a striker at the Battle of Orgreave wearing a homemade 'police' helmet adorned with the badge of the NUM, face to face with a line of police officers (Fig. 2).⁴⁷ Although the cover introduces us to the NUM, the union does not appear

⁴⁶ The 8s represent the eighth letter of the alphabet, H. HH is a reference to the Nazi party's 'Heil Hitler' salute.

⁴⁷ 'The Battle of Orgreave', as it has come to be known, took place on the 18th June 1984 when miners were 'secondary picketing' at the Orgreave coking plant—picketing at a place, in this case a factory ran by British Steel, that is not directly linked to the protest (McSmith 2011, 163). Estimates posit the number of strikers in something of the region of 10,000 and roughly half the number of police officers (Tarver 2014). According to police reports,

anywhere in Mort's collection. Even though the title of the collection and the cover art would leave the most casual browser aware of the nature of Mort's work, this omission of the NUM is problematic. Helen Mort was born in 1985, after the Battle of Orgreave and the 1984-5 miners' strike, at a time when union influence was already waning, particularly after the 'defeat' in the 1984-5 strike. When the collection was published, the NUM had, in reality, ceased to be a force in the British trade union movement.⁴⁸ However, the NUM's involvement in the 1984-5 strike cannot be underplayed.

II.I Helen Mort's 'Scab'

The strike and its legacy is contended within the collection's 'centrepiece' poem, 'Scab'—the only poem longer than two pages in the collection. The poem's five sections move between the legacy of the 1984-5 strike and Mort's time as an undergraduate at Cambridge.

This notion of the 'scab' is a recurring one, also appearing in the title of Ely's 'Ballad of the Scabs'. One of the earliest examples of 'scab' being used to denote a strikebreaker in an industrial dispute can be found as far back as 1792,

What is a scab? He is to his *trade* what a traitor is to his *country* [...] He first sells the journeymen, and is himself afterwards sold in his turn by the masters, till at last he is despised by both and deserted by all.

(Aspinall 1949, 84)

The quotation situates the act of 'scabbing' alongside the concept of nationalism or patriotism, and essentially equates 'scabbing' with treason. Although this points to the writer's belief in the severity of the 'crime' of undermining one's fellow worker by breaking a strike, the quotation also places striking in the same bracket as 'loyalty' to the state or country. Your trade is part of your identity. In 'Ballad of the Scabs', Ely writes, in regards to the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM)⁴⁹, that workers should not

'93 pickets were arrested, with a further 51 injured along with 72 police officers' ('IPCC Sorry For Orgreave Probe Delay' 2014). To this day, the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign are still pressing the IPCC (Internal Police Complaints Commission) to investigate the South Yorkshire Police in regards to the events that took place on that day. In 2015, the IPCC said they would not be investigating the police officers in Orgreave that day, as too much time had passed ('"Battle Of Orgreave": Probe Into 1984 Miners' Clash Policing Ruled Out' 2016).

⁴⁸ The TUC website states that there are only 1,853 NUM members as of March 2016 ('NUM' 2016). That number was down to 1,065 by July 2018.

⁴⁹ The Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), which was officially established in 1985 (mostly by Nottinghamshire miners who refused to strike, or wished to return to work during the 1984-5 miners' strike), can be considered a 'scab' union.

'be seduced by bribery' as the 'war is won by unity' and staying true to your 'comrades and your class' (2015, 142). As a worker, you are not working solely for yourself, but in service of your trade, class and all those who are part of it. After selling out the 'journeymen', you will in turn be 'sold [...] by the masters'. Your support comes from your fellow workers, not those in power, however they may seek to convince you otherwise.

In the UK, trade unions were not legalised until 1871, with the publication of the Trade Union Act of the same year—although the TUC was founded in 1868. It should be highlighted that it is not necessary for a 'scab' to be part of a union that is striking. There have been numerous incidents of companies employing outside labour to continue production while a strike is in effect. In *Black Torch*, MacSweeney writes, in regards to the 1844 Durham miners' strike, that the master laid 'on special trains / bringing up strangers / from Wales' (1978, 40) to help undermine the strike. Scabs can be employed in a workplace that has a union which is calling for workers to strike, but where the 'scab' is not a member of that union, or any union at all. However, particularly in regards to miners' disputes in the UK, a large majority of those who 'scab' were members of a striking union who had chosen to contravene the orders of their union to strike. A scab, in effect, is any worker who crosses a picket line.

In the penultimate stanza of the poem's fifth and final section, Mort writes, '*They scabbed in 1926. They scabbed / in 1974. They'd scab tomorrow / if they had the chance...*' (2013, 22). The act of scabbing is entwined with industrial disputes, particularly those miners' disputes of 1926, 1974 and 1984-5, in which tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of workers went on strike. We have no specific details about 'who' scabbed, but we have a 'they', the other. Through the use of 'they' what occurs is a 'flattening' or a homogenisation of strike history whereby individual choice and social context for the scabbing are removed or intentionally ignored. This is somewhat misleading. The strike ended on the 3rd March 1985. By the end of February 1985, the total number of miners who had abandoned the strike 'exceeded 93,000' of the between 186,00 and 188,000 NUM members (Jones 1986, 184). 'They'—the 'scabs'—made up the majority of the union membership. Yet, those who had scabbed—even as far back as 1926—continue to be scabs from that point onwards in the reminiscences of those who did not. Having posited this, the tone of the final conditional phrase, '*they'd scab tomorrow / if they had the chance...*', seems to combine a lingering anger at those who crossed the picket line with a sense of sorrow that there is no opportunity for anyone to do so again, because of the destruction of the mining industry. By continuing to evoke this idea of scabbing, Mort tries to hold on to a narrative in which these distinctions are still 'necessary'. You can only scab if you are supposed to be on strike, and in most

instances strikes only occur with the presence of a (strong) trade union movement. A strike is useless without jobs to protect or working conditions to improve, as are trade unions. Those who 'scabbed' remain a reminder that there had been a trade union and other striking colleagues to undermine.

Not only is a 'scab' a person who works during a strike (and as a result contributes to undermining it), but a wound which, while beginning to heal, still bears the visual mark of damage having been done. The 'scab' in this second sense is also evident in Mort's poem, the repercussions and marks of the strike have yet to disappear. The poem itself opens by positioning us directly in the midst of the strike:

A stone is lobbed in '84,
hangs like a star over Orgreave.
Welcome to Sheffield. Border-land,
our town of miracles - the wine
Turning to water in the pubs
(Mort 2013, 16)

Without explaining what happened in 1984, in terms of the strike, or what is or was 'Orgreave', Mort presents these events as indelibly linked to any discussion of Sheffield—enough to constitute a 'Welcome'. This sets up a division between the poet and reader or, more specifically, those who come from ex-mining communities and those who have not lived (directly) with the legacy of the strike of 1984-5. In the poem, 1984 *is* the strike and the Battle of Orgreave; no more explanation is needed apart from these two references. Opening the poem in the present passive voice, 'is lobbed' rather than the more grammatically suitable 'was lobbed', presents not just the violence of the event, but also the contemporary ramifications of it. We are given no agent who 'lobbed' the stone, this is either irrelevant, or the name of the thrower is lost to history and remembered only by their actions. The 'legacy' of 1984 remains, not the names of those involved. Using 'lobbed', as opposed to 'threw', suggests that there is no specific target, just a general direction, and that everyone is a potential victim. Mort removes all human figures in the first two lines. With no thrower or intended victim, Mort figuratively leaves the stone suspended in mid-air, never reaching the ground but shining down 'over Orgreave' until the poem's close. This is a place where time has stood still, the action of the strike arresting any forward movement, yet at the same time 'illuminating' everything that has come since, and proving a fitting introduction to '*Sheffield*'.

The single star over Orgreave brings to mind either the Pole (or North) star by which travellers would navigate their way or the star of Bethlehem from the Old Testament, signifying the birth of Christ. In the

poem, the stone, which Mort likens to a star, and Orgreave become a focal point around which people can 'rally'. Orgreave and the protest which happened there come to symbolise something infinitely bigger than the 1984-5 strike. However, if we push the Bible story further, it is the 'wise men' who, after seeing the star, report it to Herod. Herod then calls for the execution of all the young males in Bethlehem, so as to prevent the loss of his throne. Transposing this reading to the poem, the stone/star becomes not only a rallying point, but also that which causes untold suffering for years to come. This may appear hyperbolic; however, the closure of the mines led to the destruction of many mining communities and lack of jobs for future generations—'at the onset of the strike, the NCB [National Coal Board] employed a workforce of 208,000 [...] Within ten years, more than 90 per cent of the jobs were gone' (McSmith 2011, 169).⁵⁰ Herod's 'massacre of the innocents' is about the threat of new leadership and the attempt to negate future challenges to his power. Mort is suggesting that Thatcher's destruction of the mining industry should be read in the same way, as an attempt to preserve political power at any cost. If you destroy an industry, you inevitably destroy the union that represents it. In light of this, '*Welcome to Sheffield*' takes on a far more demoralizing resonance as a place unable to forget or move on, as a city in a state of arrested development where the 'miracles' consist of the 'wine / turning to water in the pubs' (Mort 2013, 16). Jen Harvie states that 'remembering can be a progressive or regressive political act' (2005, 41); here, remembering is being used to show how development has not simply been arrested but is actively regressing. The legacy of the strike continues, but 'development' does not.

'Scab' ends with the stone from the poem's opening finally crashing through 'your windowpane', where the 'you' is 'left / to guess which picket line you crossed':

One day, it crashes through
 your windowpane, the stone,
 the word, the fallen star. You're left
 to guess which picket line
 you crossed - a gilded College gate,
 a better supermarket, the entrance
 to your flat where, even now, someone
 has scrawled the worst insult they can -
 a name. Look close. It's yours.

(Mort 2013, 22-23)

⁵⁰ In his report on Ex-Mining communities Simon Parker quotes David Parry, spokesperson for the Coalfields Communities Campaign, as saying: '*You get 50 jobs created in a place where 2,000 men used to work and this means older men in particular are parked outside the labour market*' (2005, 5).

The past comes crashing into the present of the poem, destroying the 'view' of the strike that had been created, challenged and undermined through various recollections and reconstructions of the strike, and through the refashioning of these events as a poem. As Seamus Milne states, 'far from being remote from our time, the miners' opposition to Thatcher's market and privatization juggernaut makes even clearer sense in the wake of the 2008 crash than it did at the time' (2014, 397). Both the reader and Mort become the 'scab' of the poem's title. The 'you' is left to 'guess' which picket line was crossed, the arbitrary nature of the guess implying that all of us have in some fashion 'crossed the picket line', without being fully aware of it. Yet, these crossed borders—'a gilded College gate / a better supermarket, the entrance to your flat' (Mort 2013, 23)—speak to the feeling in the 1980s that 'no longer was being working class something to be proud of: it was something to escape from' (Jones 2012, 40). Mort is suggesting that we are now becoming, or have become, products of the strike's legacy. The stone thrown from the 1984-5 miners' strike becomes a symbol of what has been forgotten in terms of the ideals of social equality that underpinned the strike. In the same way that Harrison's work is concerned with leaving behind his 'heritage', Mort brings the same concerns bursting into the twenty-first century and ends the poem with another allusion to Harrison: 'someone / has scrawled the worst insult they can - / a name. Look close. It's yours' (Mort 2013, 23). The 'look close' conjures the image of someone straining to read a name, that, while theirs, has become unfamiliar to them. As earlier in the poem where a re-enactor is kicked until 'he doesn't know his name' (Mort 2013, 19), here the name is never given to us and in that space it becomes that of the reader. The poem breaks through the 'glass' which positions the reader as an observer, and repositions the reader as both the subject and the object of the poem. The reader becomes the 'you' who has crossed the picket line and the 'scrawled' name becomes the reader's own. The act of reading the poem becomes an act of scabbing in itself. The reader is 'exposed' as (unintentionally) complicit in the continuation and dissemination of these strike narratives. The legacy of the miners' strike is conveyed as being so pervasive that there is no 'you' (reading the poem) that is exempt from its influence and legacy.

This concern with naming continues in the 'third section' of the poem. Mort's focus turns to one of the most unusual works created in response to the miners' strike 1984-5, artist Jeremy Deller's 2001 re-enactment of the Battle of Orgreave. The re-enactment featured 'eight hundred people, many of whom were ex-miners or police involved in the original encounter' (Mort 2013, N.p). Here it seems appropriate to quote the section in its entirety:

This is a reconstruction. Nobody
will get hurt. There are miners playing
coppers, ex-coppers shouting
Maggie, Out. There are battle specialists,
The Vikings and the Sealed Knot.
There will be opportunities to leave,
a handshake at the end. Please note
the language used for authenticity:
example - scab, example - cunt.

*

This is a re-enactment.
When I blow the whistle, charge
but not before. On my instruction,
throw your missiles in the air.
On my instruction, tackle him,
then kick him when he's down,
kick him in the bollocks, boot him
like a man in flames. Now harder,
kick him till he doesn't know his name.

*

This is a reconstruction.
It is important to film everything.
Pickets chased on horseback into Asda,
running shirtless through the aisles of tins.
A lad who sprints through ginnels,
gardens, up somebody's stairs,
into a room where two more miners
hide beneath the bed, or else
are lost - or left for dead.

(Mort 2013, 19-20)

The section opens by informing us that what we are reading is not 'real', that this poem, along with the reconstruction it recounts, is part of the attempt to fashion and reform these strike narratives. The opening line serves as a warning to the reader of what is to come and a reminder to (us and) those taking part that this is not a 'real' battle. However, the 'narrative' of the strike is still being repeated and concretized and will continue to be so. There is an interesting shift in the opening lines of the verses from 'reconstruction' to 're-enactment' and back again: you 'reconstruct' the narrative, then you 're-enact' this past narrative, before reconstructing a new narrative base on this reenactment. Narratives are shaped by narratives. By reconstructing or re-enacting something you are, in essence, creating something 'new', for both actions can only ever be an approximation of the 'original', separated as they are by time if nothing else. In her work on site-specific performance, Jen Harvie asserts that:

Site-specific performance can enact a spatial history, mediating between the past and the present most obviously, but also between the identities of the past and those of the present and future, as well as between a sense of nostalgia for the past and a sense of otherness possibly felt in the present and anticipated in the future.

(2005, 42)

Despite Harvie's contention, any reconstruction or performance enacting this type of 'spatial history'—particularly of an event such as the Battle of Orgreave—will always be influenced by the material selected—media reports, other cultural products about the event or period—that the reconstruction is based upon (and the person organising the reconstruction). Therefore, those 'identities' are still subject to the person creating the performance. In Mort's poem, the 'reconstruction' is immediately undermined by the assertion that 'nobody will get hurt' and the fact that in some cases the miners and 'coppers' who were involved will be playing the 'parts' of one another.⁵¹ It is the case that many of these miners and police officers would have come from the same communities and class as one another. Mort is highlighting the fallacy of the act, the process whereby 'history' is reduced to a staged presentation of reportedly 'true' events. As Richard Schechner, by way of Baudrillard, comments, if 'the simulation can seem real, the opposite is also true—the real can appear to be simulated' (2006, 138). Not only does Schechner's quotation speak to the event Mort is commenting upon, but also to the poem itself. The poem is a poetic 'reconstruction' of an event which was itself a reconstruction of a previous event. As Mort repeatedly highlights, through the performative action of the 'reconstruction' and through her own work, we are constantly being made aware of the way that accounts of an event can shift, be appropriated and be reconstructed—to build something again, but not necessarily in the way that it once was. Once narratives are retold and reconstructed to the extent that these reconstructions and appropriations become the 'dominant' view of an event, it is almost impossible to reestablish the 'real', if such a thing ever existed. The 'real' is simply part of the reconstruction. In the initial reconstruction, parts are assigned depending on the needs of the performance; in Mort's work, they are assigned according to the 'needs' of the poem.

However, a reconstruction does not make something an inferior copy of the original; it is 'neither a pretense nor an imitation. It is a replication of [...] itself as another' (Schechner 2006, 117). Both Mort's poem and Deller's reconstruction are original pieces of work, and original pieces which omit trade unions. As Mort's work draws directly from Deller's reenactment for the poem, as opposed to the 'real'

⁵¹ In the documentary surrounding the re-enactment, *The Battle of Orgreave*, it is said that at least some of the re-enactors were being paid to take part (Figgis 2001).

Battle of Orgreave, it shows the way that myths and narratives can be created and disseminated and how they can be appropriated to fill a particular need or narrative. Mort has chosen to use Deller's staged and documented event as her starting point, rather than the memories of miners involved in the original event, to show the arbitrary fashion by which histories can be constructed. One of the most telling lines is where Mort writes, 'This is a reconstruction. It is important to film everything'. The reconstruction of the event was a single, staged performance intended as a piece of performance or conceptual art, while the need to 'film everything' shifts the temporary into something more permanent. As the mainstream media at the time of the strike 'mostly portrayed the strike as an anti-democratic insurrection that defied economic logic' (Milne 2014, xii), the desire to capture the reconstruction on film can be viewed as a way of redressing the anti-miner narrative of the media version of the strike.⁵² Yet, as the line 'it is important to film everything' is preceded by another assertion of the reconstructed nature of the performance, and the poem is informed by a documentary about the reconstruction, there is a sense that the doctored image presented by the media is being replaced by another stylised view of the struggle. As Alan Sinfield comments, it is 'the contest between rival stories [that] produces our notions of reality' (2007, 26-7). As a great deal of the Battle of Orgreave was not filmed, the re-enactment, which by being filmed passes into something approaching permanence, becomes another 'official' version of events. The re-enactment and Mort's poem add to and complicate the 'canon' of the miners' strike legacy.

Astrid Erll asserts that 'it is only through media in the broadest sense that contents of cultural memory become accessible for the members of a mnemonic community' (2011, 104).⁵³ In this way, Mort's poem is accessing that media—or, at least, the documentation of the reconstruction—but seemingly questioning what it is that is being retained. What Mort has retained in the poem are the figures of the 'battle specialists', the new authority figures giving instructions during the re-enactment—'When I blow the whistle, charge / but not before' (2012, 19)—and the performative aspects of the 'language used for

⁵² Famously, the BBC news edited the film from Orgreave so that it appeared that the miners had attacked the police, not vice versa as was the case. In their 'eagerness to select and shape events to fit a pre-formulated interpretation' the BBC 'missed by a mile what was to become the main story of Orgreave' (Masterman 1984, 105). In the BBC's news report, 'the violence at Orgreave was presented unequivocally as picket violence [...] with picketing turning to rioting and destruction and the police compelled to act defensively to retain control under tremendous pressure' (Masterman 1984, 101-102). However, ITN's footage showed that the decision to "turn nasty" was one deliberately made by the police. The film showed the police lines opening up, the horses galloping into a group of pickets, who were simply standing around, and the riot police following up wielding their truncheons' (Masterman 1984, 102).

⁵³ As well as Deller's Orgreave re-enactment, Joshua Oppenheimer's (truly harrowing) documentary *The Act of Killing* (2013) foregrounds the notion of the 'mnemonic community'. In the movie, members of Pancasila Youth, an Indonesian pro-regime paramilitary group, are encouraged by Oppenheimer to re-enact a number of the (between 500,000 and 1 million) murders carried out by their group during the 1965-66 Indonesian Genocide.

authenticity'. These 'battle specialists' come to shape the narrative and control how the story is told. The original miners involved in the battle, however, have been marginalised. Harvie states that site-specific performance 'may validate identities that have been historically marginalised or oppressed, and they may revise potential imbalances in the power dynamics between communities' (2005, 41). In the poem, the identities are in fact invalidated by the switching of 'roles' with 'miners playing / coppers' and 'ex-coppers shouting / *Maggie, Out*' (Mort 2012, 19). To swap roles suggests that there is no validity in your 'original' role, just in the role you are *assigned* for the performance; the fact that the people are ex-miners or ex-coppers becomes irrelevant. The story you are telling and the performance must have the appearance of 'truth', even if it does not reflect the reality of an event. However, it could also be read that the concerns of the strike are universal ones. Whether miner or police officer, all are caught up in the legacy of the miners' strike. If roles are assigned regardless of the participants' original job, there is a suggestion that, as both miners and police officers would have come from similar class (and community), they could easily have been on the other side during Orgreave. David Griffiths, a miner at the Taff Merthyr Colliery in Wales, recalled that during the strike 'more and more police were drafted in and even though the government strongly denied it, many miners believe the army were also on the picket line. I saw it with my own eyes, a miner on a picket line with me spotted his own son, who was supposedly in the army fighting for his country [...] this man would never speak to his son again' (Butts-Thompson 2014, 22). At one time, these types of jobs offered security and a reasonable wage for many. Harrison's 'class v. class' can be seen playing out here (2008, 11); the other 'class' was not necessarily those from a different economic and social background, but a different version of yourself or your family, a version who joined the police force rather than going down the mines, or vice versa.

When one re-enactor is 'told' to 'kick him till he doesn't know his name', there is tension between the assertion that 'nobody will get hurt' and the overt encouragement of violence. Although 'each instance of remembering constitutes its subject differently and subjectively, eliminating some details and enhancing others as changing conditions demand' (Harvie 2005, 41), it is important to look at what details are being presented. If the re-enactor is instructed to kick the person until 'he doesn't know his name', there is the implicit suggestion that there is some value to be held within a name. Yet, we do not know and are never given the name of the re-enactor or the role they are supposed to be playing—it could be either picket or police officer—and ironically we are being told to forget something that has apparently already been forgotten or simply not supplied to us. It is that which is forgotten that becomes the focus. Mort draws attention to the fact that this name has been forgotten to highlight the gaps in the histories that are told and the ways in which the individual can become lost in service of narrative. Mort

appears to be questioning the attention afforded to the violence at Orgreave, rather than those involved in the action, by highlighting the ways in which the human aspect can be lost through the retelling and restaging of events. The section of the poem ends with two miners hiding 'beneath the bed', not sure if they are 'lost' or 'left for dead'. Here the image of the miners beneath the bed remains but the names of the two do not, if they existed at all. The two miners are 'left for dead' by the re-enactment, by the poem and by the system that forced them out of work in the first place without adequate support. While the poem brings to light issues surrounding the event (Orgreave and the strike) itself and perhaps attempts to revise potential 'imbalances in the power dynamics' (Erl 2005, 41) of these narratives, Mort is showing the way in which alternative voices and figures come to be excluded from our narratives. The miners who take part in the reconstruction are there voluntarily, they become complicit in continuing and reinforcing a narrative that seeks to silence them.

The poems in this chapter show the tension between the collective and the individual in our labour narratives. They demonstrate the ways in which collectives can both obscure individual voices and yet require them to humanise our labour histories. One question throughout the poems is how do we position our labour institutions and those within them? Both MacSweeney and Ely assert the complicity between the TUC and the state, with the TUC undermining union action through 'closed door pacts' with the government or by remaining conspicuously 'silent'. In O'Brien, the figure of a striker is inserted into the poem before being sidelined by the 'official' strike narrative. Yet, Harrison and Mort warn of the dangers of seeing labour narratives as existing within these narrowly delineated boundaries, while exposing them as artful constructions. These poems see our labour narratives as a negotiation. They are a negotiation between those groups that endeavour to control the narratives and those who attempt to contest them. However, what is clear is that these positions are not absolute. In these labour narratives, how we position ourselves (and are positioned) is part of the construction.

Chapter Three: Naming Scargills and Thatchers

'My name is Alice, but —'

'It's a stupid name enough!' Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently. 'What does it mean?'

'Must a name mean something?' Alice asked doubtfully.

'Of course it must,' Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: 'my name means the shape I am — and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost.'

- Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1866)

The focus of the previous chapter was on the collective. This section explores the notion of the individual in regards to these union and strike poems, particularly those two figures, Arthur Scargill and Margaret Thatcher, whose legacy looms so large over any discussion of late-twentieth century trade unionism in the UK. In mentioning Scargill and Thatcher, why in the title to this chapter have I only used their surnames, while just two sentences ago I referred to them by their full names? This chapter will focus on the politics of naming, with particular attention to how Arthur Scargill and, to a lesser extent, Margaret Thatcher are constructed through these acts of naming and how this reveals an attempted form of cultural dominion and/or opposition in regards to union narratives. This discussion will be conducted with regards to Raymond Williams' concept of the 'dominant, residual and emergent' forms of cultural processes.

I. Williams and Scargill

In the 1985 essay 'Mining the Meaning: Key Words in the Miners' Strike', Raymond Williams wrote that 'in the coal strike, there are central issues of great importance to the society, but around them, and often obscuring them, the noise and dust and stone of confused, short-term or malignant argument' (1989b, 120). Williams defined these 'central issues' under the four keywords: '*management; economic; community; and law and order*'. Williams saw these keywords as underpinning the way in which the future of society 'would come to be decided' (1989b, 120). Williams is speaking to the potential legacies of the 1984-5 miners' strike and the concerns he had that these legacies would come to frame the strike as an almost malevolent act. Even while the strike was in progress, Williams was aware of the dangers of the strike narrative being coopted or misrepresented. Williams said that 'it is of the lasting honour of the miners, and the women, and the old people, and all the others in the defiant communities, that they

have stood up against [...] and challenged' a capitalism that 'exploits actual places and people' (1989b, 124). While these groups stood against those who sought to close the mines, they were unable to control the strike's legacy.

Lizzie and John Eldridge, in their book on Williams, *Making Connections*, write that 'the purpose of the article was not to make judgements on the tactics, timing or personalities of the strike' (2004).

Scargill is not really present in Williams' essay. He is there by implication only, as the figure who called the strike and brought it into being.¹ Yet, Scargill's actions during the miners' strike 1984-5 are undoubtedly caught up in the concerns that Williams writes about. Fred Inglis writes of Scargill being 'a self-righteous class warrior of passionate feeling and few wits but who had got hold of the truth that the class enemy was always a ruthless liar' (1998, 281). This concern with truth and lies suggests that the battle over narratives is itself caught up in a broader class politics. The enemies of the working class are those who control the dominant narrative, those who seek to exclude the voices which attempt to challenge it.

Returning to the 'dominant, residual and emergent' forms of cultural processes that were touched upon in the opening of the chapter, by 'residual' Williams is speaking of cultural processes that, while being formed in the past, are still an active and 'effective element of the present' and of current cultural processes, but are not the dominant element. An illustrative example of the complexity of such relations is that of the 'rural community':

The idea of the rural community is predominantly residual, but is in some limited respects alternative or oppositional to urban industrial capitalism, though for the most part it is incorporated, as idealization or fantasy, or as an exotic—residential or escape—leisure function of the dominant order itself.
(1977, 122)

Residual processes can be oppositional. Yet, the continuation of residual cultural processes can also be as a result of their incorporation into 'effective dominant cultures'. Williams posits that it is not simply that the 'residual' is 'incorporated', but the way this incorporated process then functions (or is made to

¹ Although Williams never wrote directly about Scargill, his 1985 novel *Loyalties*, which begins in 1936 looking at the rise of Fascism and ends at the end of 1984 in the midst of the miners' strike (yet still does not mention Scargill at all), was sent by Andrew Motion, who worked for the publisher Chatto and Windus at the time, 'to, among others, Neil Kinnock, Arthur Scargill, Christopher Ricks' (Inglis 1998, 282). There is nothing to say whether or not Scargill received the novel, let alone read it. Kinnock was leader of the Labour party when the book was published. Ricks was an ex-colleague of Williams at Cambridge where they had clashed over the 'MacCabe Affair'. This 'affair' is documented in much greater detail in Inglis' book *Raymond Williams* (1998), specifically the chapter 'The End of an Epoch', quoted from above.

function) in a dominant culture that is important. Williams uses the phrase 'idealization or fantasy' to demonstrate the way in which the incorporated processes are refashioned as 'other'. This refashioning is a political act which seeks to 'discredit' residual cultural narratives by positioning them as 'fantasy'—a part of culture that is either impossible to retrieve or one that never actually existed. This 'idealization or fantasy' of the residual actually speaks to the way in which, as in notions of the 'pastoral' and pastoral poetry, a fantasy of the country in idealized form can haunt the urban imaginary.² However, when incorporation does occur, it is always selective. The dominant is able to choose from these residual processes, with the overarching aim of maintaining the dominant. The incorporation of forms of cultural processes that could become oppositional, or are actively outside the dominant, are managed through 'reinterpretation, dilution, projection' and 'discriminating inclusion and exclusion', which limits any potential threat to the hegemonic structure by making these processes part of the dominant (Williams 1977, 123). It is through this selective incorporation that the dominant attempts to control 'emergent' cultural forms. Emergent forms are those 'new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship' that are constantly being constructed (Williams 1977, 122). However, the difficulty with emergent forms, according to Williams, is the ability to distinguish those which are truly emergent and contribute to a form of alternative or oppositional cultural processes and those which appear emergent but are simply new manifestations and modes of the dominant (1977, 123). This is also true of our narratives and histories. Are our 'alternative voices' truly contesting how we see our histories, or are they themselves simply a contribution to those already dominant narratives? It is those practices which are truly emergent and thereby oppositional to the hegemony that are most at risk of incorporation, because it is those emergent practices that highlight the hegemony's lack of absolute control. For Williams, the 'residual' and the 'emergent' are as important as the 'dominant', for it is they that reveal 'the characteristics of the "dominant"' (1977, 122). Pushing Williams' point further, not only do the emergent and the residual reveal the characteristics of the dominant, but they can also reveal its particular and shifting fears.

In the case of writing, Williams suggests that 'a great deal' of it is 'of a residual kind' and, writing in 1973,

² Philip Larkin's 'Here' demonstrates this idea rather effectively where the solitude of 'skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants' begins to haunt the 'domes and spires' and 'residents from raw estates' (1988, 136).

he suggests that this is 'deeply true of much English literature in the last half-century'. He goes on:

Some of its fundamental meanings and values have belonged to the cultural achievements of long-past stages of society. So widespread is this fact, and the habits of mind it supports, that in many minds 'literature' and 'the past' acquire a certain identity, and it is then said that there is now no literature: all that glory is over.

(2005, 44-45)

If 'literature' and 'the past' have acquired a certain 'widespread' identity, then it follows that most of our writing is not truly oppositional. The poems this chapter explores can be seen as contending with the residual 'idealisation' and 'denigration' of strike legacies and narratives, while also questioning the dominant cultural narratives that they inevitably have to work within. Even so, Williams sees much writing as essentially 'a form of contribution to the effective dominant culture':

Indeed many of the specific qualities of literature—its capacity to embody and enact and perform certain meanings and values, or to create in single particular ways what would be otherwise merely general truths—enable it to fulfil this effect function with great power.

(2005, 45)

Williams' assertion that most writing 'is a form of contribution to the effective dominant culture' is, to my mind, instructive. However, with this chapter I contend that through acts of naming and renaming these 'union' poems demonstrate the ways in which dominant cultural forms attempt to assume (and subsume) residual and emergent cultural modes while those modes, in turn, attempt to resist such dominion. The final lines of Tony Harrison's 'Them & [uz]' exemplifies this idea more succinctly than I can: 'My first mention in the *Times* / automatically made Tony Anthony' (1995, 34). Who makes our names and what do we (and others) make of them?

*

II. Naming

When it comes to proper nouns in poetry and literature, particularly in reference to 'real' figures, how we come to judge and read these names inevitably shifts, depending on the circumstances in which the name is uttered. While, for example, 'Mr Scargill', 'Scargill' and 'Arthur Scargill' refer to the same object, these objects are constructed and conceived differently in each iteration. In Theodore Sider's development of Kripke's 'rigid designators', Sider asserts that 'a proper name denotes different objects

relative to different times' (2001, 193).³ I would broaden Sider's claim and state that a proper name denotes different objects relative to different times, places and media. Highlighting the forms and places in which these proper names 'exist' allows us to more effectively examine both the situation in which the name is constructed and the situation in which the name is 'received', and the dynamic between these two states. A proper name does not just denote different objects relative to different times, the name is itself a different object.

With specific reference to literature, Alastair Fowler writes that 'literary names are not inherited: they must be found or invented. And writers find it hard to find the right name, one that relinquishes shadowy alternatives and embraces a definite character' (2008, 99). This idea of names in literature being 'found' or inherited' is only useful so far. Although Fowler may be referring primarily to the process of a fiction writer ascribing a character a name, it is overly reductive to propose of anything as having a 'definite' character. This chapter contends with 'characters' in strike poems whose names (and characters) are both invented *and* inherited. They are inherited in so much as, for instance, Scargill and Thatcher have already acquired names—those given to them at birth—and invented in that the names—King Arthur, Mr Scargill—are consciously constructed and presented in a form to induce, expose or further a particular form of cultural narrative.

*

³ Saul Kripke, in his collection of lectures, *Naming and Necessity*, outlines the nature of what he terms the 'rigid designator', a 'rigid designator' being something that 'in every possible world designates the same object' (1980, 48). As an example, Kripke posits that 'Nixon' as proper noun is a rigid designator as it can refer only to 'Nixon'. As a counterpoint, he argues 'the President of the U.S. in 1970' designates a certain man, Nixon; but someone else (e.g., Humphrey) might have been the President in 1970, and Nixon might not have; so this designator is not rigid' (Kripke 1980, 48-49). Therefore, in regards to the trade union focus of this thesis, 'Scargill' and 'Thatcher' would qualify as rigid designators but 'President of the NUM' and 'Prime Minister' would not. Pushing this notion further, Kripke's claims mean that when we use a 'title'—one earned or bestowed—to designate someone, we are necessarily invoking all the other figures that the designation could be applied to. Conversely, we are referring to the idea of the designation as much as we are the person who possesses it, thereby both augmenting the person holding the 'office'—in this case, Scargill and Thatcher—and obscuring them behind their position.

In the poems that reference the NUM, one of the most commonly bestowed titles on Arthur Scargill is the altogether rather bombastic, yet often tongue-in-cheek, 'King Arthur'.

II.I Paul Bentley's 'The Two Magicians'

Paul Bentley's 'The Two Magicians', from 2011's *Largo*, has as its focus the 1984-5 miners' strike, but situates memories of the strike within the apparently nostalgic context of the poet's teenage years. Of the poem itself Bentley said that: 'I thought of this poem as a poem of voices – a patchwork of direct quotations, memories, and echoes, stitched loosely onto the old ballad' (Bentley). As this suggests, Bentley's work is an amalgam of registers and layers of cultural appropriation. In *Memory in Oral Tradition*, when talking about traditional ballads, David Rubin claims that formally the 'general properties, or constraints' of the ballad 'remain stable' and that unlike the traditional epic, the 'exact words change more slowly' (1995, 5). Bentley's 'old ballad' points towards the poem being a work of, or at least inspired by, an oral tradition where the 'original' authorship of the ballad becomes less important than the continuation of the ballad itself and the story that it contains. In terms of union narratives, it is the legacy that is of note, not who constructed it. In a review of *Largo*, Matthew Stewart homes in upon Bentley's use of 'high' and 'low' cultural references: 'The miners all coming out at midnight. / Kev Robinson's sister going to bed. / Porphyro stealing along at midnight' (Bentley 2011, 8). Stewart highlights the fact that "'Kev" and "steal" (in this semantic context) are contrasting registers, and the effect is forced home by the allusions to miners and Porphyro in a single stanza' (2012). Bentley is situating his personal memories of the strike, alongside a reference to Keats' *The Eve of St. Agnes*, to establish a space for the poem to present the patchwork and constructed nature of our union narratives and legacies.

It is within this context of mixed registers and cultural reference points that 'King Arthur' is introduced:

King Arthur striking the table
harder, raving and growing more fierce and wild.
New Order: Because we're rebels.
Talks breaking down. O bide, lady, bide.
Johnny Marr's guitar screaming, echoing -
Mum's *Turn that down I can't hear myself think!*
Two boys on top of the pile, picking coal.
Me thoughts I heard one calling: Child
(Bentley 2011, 12)

Bentley inundates us with a range of (pop) cultural reference points. 'King Arthur' is an obvious reference to Arthur Scargill, and a nickname used by his supporters and detractors alike, which situates Scargill as a 'character' from legend as well as connecting the poem to popular cultural parlance of the mid-80s. Alongside 'King Arthur', the 'table' becomes that which seated the legendary 'Knights of the Round Table'.⁴ 'O bide, lady, bide' comes from an old British folk song, 'The Two Magicians', from which Bentley's poem takes its name. The song tells the story of a woman trying to fend off the advances of a 'coal black-smith'—a story that also links rather neatly to that of Thatcher and Scargill.⁵ The first, second and final lines are lifted almost verbatim from the seventeenth century poet George Herbert's 'The Collar' (1633). Finally, and most contemporarily, 'New Order' are a rock band formed in the 1980s and Johnny Marr was lead guitarist in The Smiths, both bands originate from Manchester. The work is a tapestry of poems, myths, histories and pop culture. All of these things are part of Bentley's strike narrative.

Of particular interest here is Bentley's attempt to, after a fashion, write Arthur Scargill into, and make him the protagonist for, Herbert's poem. 'The Collar' opens with the line 'I struck the board, and cried, "No more"' (2005, 379). The cry is uttered by the 'collared' protagonist of the poem wishing to unbind themselves, at least temporarily, from that which would 'control' them. The final four lines of Herbert's poem are also 'reimagined' by Bentley:

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
 At every word
 Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*
 And I replied *My Lord.*
 (Herbert 2005, 379)

By equating Scargill with, or casting him as, the 'choleric' figure from Herbert's poem, Bentley is attempting to situate Scargill (and himself) within a broader canon of literary figures and histories. We have Arthur Scargill no longer as a union figurehead, but as part of cultural milieu perpetuated by the

⁴ The first reference to Arthur's round table did not come with Arthur's first recorded appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*, but from Wace of Jersey's 1155 vernacular 'translation' of *History, Roman de Brut*—the quotation marks are because Wace greatly altered the source material (Fleming 2001, 9-11). John Fleming describes the table as a representation of 'good fellowship and tragically flawed chivalric order' (2001, 6).

⁵ 'I'd rather I were dead and cold / And my body laid in grave / Ere a rusty stock o' coal-black-smith, / My maidenhead should have' (Buchan 1875, 25).

poem. Bentley untethers Scargill from a solely union based 'environment'; even if the use of the verb 'to strike' is a less than subtle link to the miners' struggle and Scargill's involvement in it. By using 'King Arthur', Arthur Scargill becomes both elevated to the position occupied by one of the UK's most omnipresent legends, King Arthur, and subsumed by his relationship to it. Arthur Scargill cannot escape the association with the 'idea' of 'King Arthur'. It is an idea that suggests power, but, as in the Raymond Williams's quotation earlier in the chapter, it is an idea which actually involves a degree of incorporation that turns Scargill into an 'idealization or fantasy' that removes his political efficacy (Williams 1977, 122). As fantasy or idealisation Scargill poses significantly less of a 'threat'.

When one realises that Bentley is 'situating' 'King Arthur' within the Herbert poem, Arthur Scargill as a 'historical' figure becomes buried further beneath, or must bear the weight of, Bentley's, and our own, range of reference points. What Bentley is doing is destabilizing notions of authority and foregrounding questions regarding narrative and legacy. The final 'my lord' of Herbert's poem points towards the character's acceptance of authority, or a ceding of one's opposition to authority. Yet, Bentley links the finally 'acceptant' figure in 'The Collar' with himself, as the person who thought he 'heard one calling: Child'. Childhood becomes the frame through which the stanza is viewed. Although Bentley 'withholds' the final line of 'The Collar' from his poem, leaving Scargill 'fierce' and 'wild', this is tempered by the wild/Child rhyme. Although the 'memories' of Scargill are as one 'fierce and wild', Bentley is aware that those are the remembrances of the 'child'. In 'The Two Magicians', Scargill never reaches a point of 'acceptance'. Our reading is 'haunted' by the acceptance from the 'omitted' final line of 'The Collar' — 'And I replied *My Lord*' — which the Scargill of the poem never receives. We are presented with a particular narrative. The narrative, by its nature, is constructed so as to give significance to certain aspects that Bentley has selected, while obscuring other elements of the strike narrative. Bentley reveals to us his workings, yet leaves it up to us to give attention to them. Bentley foregrounds *his* selection process for *his* particular strike narrative. Yet, the 'space' that Bentley's selection creates and the alternative cultural products that he invokes, regardless of his intention, demonstrates the impossibility of attempting to effectively silence counter-narratives.

Bentley brings onto the 'stage' of the poem a collection of images and associations to present a cross-section of a number of the influences that make up his memories of the strike. They exist together in the same 'moment', the 'stories' work with and compete against one another for dominance. This dominance is created and structured (although not necessarily stabilised) by the reader's prior knowledge or awareness of the 'stories' being told. What is taking place is a form of dialectical thinking,

or a warning about it. As Benjamin Kunkel writes in *Utopia or Bust*, evoking Hegel in reference to the legacy of Fredric Jameson, ‘a basic feature of dialectical thinking is the liability of subject and object to turn into each other, for a way a thing is looked at to become part of the look of a thing [...] Does a statue confirm the living influence of a man, or only that he belongs in the past?’ (2014, 58). This is the question Bentley poses with ‘King Arthur’. Does the idea of Arthur Scargill ‘survive’ on its own or is he being ‘propped up’ by the poem itself? The answer could easily be the first: Scargill is being written about by Bentley because his legacy exists, or at least Bentley believes in the legacy. However, this legacy is now tied up in so much narrative, counter-narrative and cultural ‘bleed’ that is impossible to separate the man from the cultural products in which he is represented. The narratives and legacies themselves are constructing the idea of Scargill.

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II.II Barry MacSweeney’s ‘John Bunyan to Johnny Rotten’

It is not only Bentley, writing in 2011, who plays with the image/myth of Arthur Scargill. Barry MacSweeney’s 1997 *Book of Demons*—which deals predominantly with MacSweeney’s alcoholism and mental health issues—includes the poem ‘John Bunyan to Johnny Rotten’. W.N. Herbert describes the poem as ‘a type of psychic journey from the state of mind of the Pilgrim to that of John Lydon’ (Herbert 2013, 155), a journey in which Arthur Scargill plays a relatively minor role. Nevertheless, it is a poem which frames Scargill in a fashion not dissimilar to his presentation in Bentley’s ‘The Two Magicians’. MacSweeney ends with ‘King Arthur’ being ‘consumed’ by another cultural reference point, in this instance the nursery rhyme ‘Sing a Song of Sixpence’:

Tom, King Arthur’s in his counting house, counting out the wastage,
finalising the blame,
And who would say it, Thomas, who would lift the gall from the cracked glass,
but to say: Arthur, you too were a croupier of blame, you too
Swept the table clean with the other social model, Margaret of St. Francis?
(2003, 286)

In MacSweeney’s poem, Arthur Scargill is not simply the ‘King Arthur’ of Arthurian legend, but the King from ‘Sing a Song of Sixpence’.⁶ The nursery rhyme MacSweeney uses is much more recognisable than

⁶ According to Iona and Peter Opie, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, unlike many of the theories surrounding the rhyme that cite Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, the printing of the English Bible and forms of astrology,

'The Collar' used by Bentley. As a result, MacSweeney's replacement of 'money' (from 'Sing a Song of Sixpence') with 'wastage' is more keenly felt. Our expectations are not satisfied by the poem. That is not to say that 'money' does not exist, but that it is obscured or replaced in the poem. After we identify the nursery rhyme, our expectation necessarily precedes our reading of the end of the line; we expect to find the word 'money', yet we are forced to recalibrate our expectation in light of the poem. We expect 'money', we find 'wastage'. 'Wastage' means the reduction of a workforce. Scargill is counting loss: the loss of a mining industry, the loss of status, the loss of his own power, and the lost wages of the miners. The title 'King' takes on a quality of failure, as one who has the status or perception of power and influence, but being without 'funds'—here both monetary and in terms of influence—is left with only a title. MacSweeney's use of the term 'King' is not mockery, but rather the creation of a symbol, of one unable to disengage themselves from the past, or be disengaged from the stories surrounding their past. The image presented to us is of Arthur Scargill alone, attempting to find someone to 'blame' for the failure of the 1984-5 strike. MacSweeney's use of 'finalising', with its emphasis on something nearing, but never reaching, an end, leaves Scargill looking to attribute blame but never finding it, with the implication being that he is unwilling to hold himself accountable for any of the failures of the miners' strike 1984-5. MacSweeney presents us with a feedback loop in which Scargill becomes locked within a myth of his own creation, which is also our creation of him. This dimension in which the myth and representation become the figure of Scargill, and continues so that the figure becomes the myth, demonstrates the ways in which these labour narratives are 'trapped' within and perpetuate narratives of power. In the end, the legacy of Scargill becomes part of our own making.

MacSweeney's belief that Scargill bears some of the responsibility for the ultimately unsuccessful strike is made explicit a few lines later—'Arthur, you too were a croupier of blame' (2003, 286). A croupier is only present to facilitate the losing (or winning) of money by those gambling. However, there is an ambiguity regarding MacSweeney's 'of blame', with the 'croupier' (Arthur) being both 'cause' 'of blame' and also 'possessor' 'of blame'. It is the croupier who at the end of a 'hand' sweeps the cards back in, the cards being the justification and cause of success or failure, depending on the outcome of the hand. The 'hands' that people have been dealt, as a result of the collapse of the mining industry were, in part, dispensed by Scargill. Scargill becomes the orchestrator of the 'game', he is part of it, but not a direct participant in its playing, or in how it resolves itself or who wins. It is out of his hands, he does not

the most likely and straightforward explanation for the rhyme is 'that it is a description of a familiar form of entertainment'. It would seem that recipes that involve birds flying out of pies goes back to the mid-1800s (Opie 1997, 471).

control his own narrative. The table here is either card or dining table. In the latter, we have the image of Scargill antagonistically brushing away from view the remnants of the metaphorical 'blame'. Scargill is 'cleaning up' his narrative, removing that which he doesn't want to be seen. As to the relationship he sees between Arthur Scargill and Margaret Thatcher, MacSweeney leaves these lines ambiguous. Arthur is written as sweeping 'the table clean with the other social model, Margaret of St Francis'. Yet, we cannot fix a definite reading to MacSweeney's 'with'. Here, 'with' can either be viewed as 'in conjunction with', Scargill and Thatcher working together to clean the table, or Scargill using Thatcher—Margaret of St Francis—to clean the table *with*, as if she were a piece of cleaning equipment. By not allowing a concrete reading of these lines MacSweeney is constructing a narrative in which Scargill and Margaret Thatcher are both subject to and complicit with one another. Their legacies inform one another. By allowing both of these ambivalences to exist, MacSweeney creates almost a 'historical' feedback loop, whereby one both confirms the other's status and at the same time challenges that status by their very existence. This challenge leads to a confirmation of the other's importance.

MacSweeney's shift from 'King Arthur' to 'Arthur' is precipitated by an implied shift in the relationship of the imagined 'speaker' to Arthur Scargill: the use of the Christian name conveying the impression of a (semi-)personal relationship between speaker and recipient. What we are also presented with is a 'dethroning' of King Arthur. The 'legend' is removed and rather than 'counting', Arthur can be held accountable. There is also a shift from 'Tom' to 'Thomas', a reverse in the direction of formality witnessed by the move from 'King Arthur' to 'Arthur'. Paul Batchelor says that

Tom is a fellow patient MacSweeney meets while receiving treatment in the detox clinic [...] Although Tom only appears in the last two poems of the sequence ('Tom In The Market Square Outside Boots' and 'John Bunyan To Johnny Rotten'), he is a crucial symbol of the speaker's redemption, and the poems in which he appears are two of MacSweeney's finest achievements.
(2008, 228)

Batchelor's suggestion of 'Tom' as a symbol of the 'speaker's redemption' is useful when considering the relationship between 'Tom' and 'Arthur'. The speaker's comments regarding Scargill are directed towards Tom/Thomas. In this section of the poem, the speaker is both talking to 'Tom', who becomes 'Thomas', as well as revealing a power dynamic through the act of naming and renaming. These acts of naming expose the tension between public—'Thomas'—and private—'Tom'—representations of Scargill. It is 'Tom' who is aligned with 'King Arthur'—considering 'King Arthur' to be the public 'face' and 'legend' of 'Scargill'—and 'Thomas' who is aligned with 'Arthur', the private 'Scargill'. MacSweeney presents a relational quality between the two (or four) figures of Scargill and Thomas in which the negotiation

between the public and the private representations of both 'characters', and their relationship to the other character in this negotiation, is continuously being reimagined and repositioned.

If we read Tom/Thomas as the same person, the increase in formality places Arthur and Thomas on the same 'level', both being referred to by their Christian names. This shift in name precipitates a change in tone. By addressing 'Tom' as 'Thomas', the poems' speaker refers to Tom/Thomas as one might a child. We cannot assume that an elevation of register necessarily leads to an increase in 'respect'. The speaker is managing the power structures, through the act of naming—without forgetting that these structures are themselves being managed by MacSweeney. An increase in formality can be used to distance an other who is unable to, or simply does not, understand the 'rules of engagement' for the interaction. Yet, 'Tom' cannot respond. This 'conversation' is wholly one-sided: MacSweeney is talking *at* Tom and we, while reading, perform the power dynamics of the poem by constructing a 'Tom'. We as readers are forced into a position where we become complicit with the 'dethroning' of Scargill and the elevation of 'Tom'. MacSweeney demonstrates the ways we become implicated in shaping our own narratives, even without necessarily being aware of it.

There is a parallel reading to the quoted section in which 'Thomas' is Thomas the Apostle, more commonly referred to as doubting Thomas. If we envisage 'And who would say it, Thomas' as a question or a beseeching to 'Thomas', there is a different power dynamic at work. By claiming that the biblical Thomas—he who would not be convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead—should perhaps be the person to tell Scargill that he was partly to blame for the failure of the miners' strike 1984-5, MacSweeney is mocking Scargill.⁷ He is ironically claiming that the only person that could convince Scargill that he has anything to account for is history's most notorious sceptic. Through the invocation of the biblical Thomas, Scargill is situated within a larger theological framework. Even though we have removed the title of 'King' and are left with the more humble 'Arthur', there is a shift from the myth (King Arthur) to a form of theological 'aggrandisement' by placing Scargill in conversation with Thomas the Apostle. What this shift does is place Scargill within the realms of a 'residual culture'. Raymond Williams expounds that a residual culture is one that 'has effectively been formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process' (1977, 122). He is still present in the construction of our union narratives, and therefore 'active' in the cultural process, but he is no longer a 'threat' to the culturally

⁷ 'So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe"' (*King James Bible*, John 20:25).

‘dominant’ present.

The interesting facet of residual culture is that it contains elements that may ‘have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture’ as well as elements that have ‘been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture’ (1977, 122). In these cultural terms, Scargill as ‘King Arthur’ encompasses elements of the ‘dominant’ and the ‘oppositional’. In terms of the ‘dominant’, ‘King’ acts as a reference to the monarchy and representation of dominion. As ‘oppositional’, ‘Scargill’ is referred to as monarch without having any of the legal sovereignty which goes with it. MacSweeney presents a shift whereby this move from ‘King Arthur’ to ‘Arthur’ reinterprets the role that Scargill occupies. And in 1997 when the poem was published, Scargill had very little real political efficacy.⁸ The dominant and oppositional elements evinced by the ‘King’ of Scargill are stripped away. It is not so much that Scargill becomes ‘incorporated’ into a dominant mode or mollified as Arthur, but that he has slipped or is slipping towards cultural irrelevance. There is no requirement to incorporate something that is no longer a threat. As ‘King Arthur’, Scargill has a public profile and a cultural history, as ‘Arthur’ he has none. In this reading, the contrast between ‘Arthur’ and ‘Margaret of St Francis’ becomes even more stark.

‘Margaret of St Francis’ seems to be an amalgam of Margaret Thatcher, Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and, perhaps, Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247-1297), a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis. When Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister on 4th May 1979 she read from a prayer which has often been attributed to Francis of Assisi: ‘Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope’ (‘Remarks On Becoming Prime Minister (St Francis’ Prayer)’). When MacSweeney’s ‘John Bunyan to Johnny Rotten’ was published, Thatcher had been out of office as Prime Minister for about seven years. A Conservative government led by John Major still held power in Parliament, while Tony Blair’s (New) Labour would soon become the majority party. Although many reading the poem would be familiar with Thatcher’s quoting from Assisi, what MacSweeney is doing is re-presenting a part of cultural history that may have been obscured by the events of Thatcher’s premiership. MacSweeney is both foregrounding this cultural history through his reference to St Francis, but also veiling it by withholding the direct relationship between Thatcher and Assisi. As someone who referred to Thatcher as a ‘stainless bint’ in the poem ‘Colonel B’ (2003, 92), MacSweeney is undoubtedly critical when using the name ‘Margaret of St Francis’. The reading that Thatcher gave is also rather ironic given that the miners’ strike

⁸ Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party received only 0.2% of the national vote in the 1997 General Election (Morgan 1997).

1984-5 and the Falklands war would suggest that it would not be for 'harmony' that Thatcher's premiership would be remembered. My suggestion that 'Margaret of St Francis' could refer to Saint Margaret of Cortona is, on the one hand, because Saint Margaret was a member of the Order of St Francis. Also, continuing with the notion that this is an ironic portrayal of Thatcher, Saint Margaret of Cortona is the patron saint for many of the most vulnerable people in society: the homeless, orphans, the mentally ill, single mothers, etcetera. In 1998, on the subject of single mothers, Thatcher was quoted as saying to an audience in Kentucky, USA, that 'it is far better to put these children in the hands of a very good religious organisation, and the mother as well, so that they will be brought up with family values' and that the provision of social security benefits only exacerbated the 'problem' of illegitimacy ('Thatcher Stirs Up Single Parents' 1998). Thatcher's legacy is certainly not one of improving the conditions of society's most in need.⁹

Looking at the phrase 'the other social model', in light of the readings of 'Arthur' and 'Margaret of St Francis', MacSweeney is questioning the way authority is presented. By situating Thatcher as 'the other social model', and thereby reflexively doing the same to Scargill, we are presented with the only two 'models' to which we can subscribe: a model here being a thing used as an archetype to be imitated or adhered to. In this reading, there is no room for ambiguity about your political affiliation, you are either Scargill or Thatcher, and modelled as such.¹⁰ 'The other' positions each Scargill and Thatcher as a necessary and justifying mirror for their legacies to endure. This notion of the 'mirror' is strengthened through the image of 'the cracked glass' just two lines prior. Here, MacSweeney is referencing Sylvia Plath's 'Thalidomide' where Plath writes, 'The glass cracks across, / The image / Flees and aborts like dropped mercury' (1981, 252). In 'Thalidomide', itself echoing Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott',¹¹ Plath describes, from the point of view of a pregnant woman who has presumably been prescribed thalidomide, the physical malformations of a soon to be aborted child. Plath's cracked glass—in this case a broken thermometer—exemplifies an 'otherness' evinced by disability.¹² MacSweeney uses the same

⁹ During Thatcher's time as Prime Minister, the level of poverty—the percentage of the population earning below 60% of the median income—in the UK almost doubled, from 13.4% in 1979 to 22.2% when she left office in 1990 (Lansley and Mack).

¹⁰ It is probably only a coincidence that 'Thomas' comes from the Aramaic "Ta'oma'" meaning 'twin'.

¹¹ There is also a possible link here with Joyce's 'cracked looking-glass of a servant' being a 'symbol of Irish art' from *Ulysses* (1998, 7) and Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying', where Wilde invokes the 'cracked looking-glass' as a symbol of his objection towards 'art being treated as a mirror' (1997).

¹² When MacSweeney was writing the poem, and indeed while he was still alive, there had been no form of governmental compensation for those affected by thalidomide between 1958-61. It would not be until 2010 when the first, and as it turned out vastly inadequate, compensation was paid to those living with the effects of the drug, and some form of apology given to the victims. After the initial £20m compensation package from the government in 2010, in 2012 an extra £80m was made available to cope with the rising costs associated with the condition

image to position Scargill and Thatcher as reflections of one another that have come to reject or refuse their similarities. It is this 'cracked glass' that leads to the 'distortion' of the names we find within 'John Bunyan to Johnny Rotten'. This 'distortion' involves both a rejection of and an attraction to the other, which in turn creates a form of suspended stasis, with each side 'supporting' the other. MacSweeney is demonstrating how Scargill and Thatcher are integral to the cultural continuation of the other. Both Scargill and Thatcher are constructed though and limited by their relation to the other.

There is another argument to be made that through the modification of names we witness a Scargill who requires Thatcher for his own legacy more than Thatcher's legacy relies on Scargill. The shift from 'King' to 'Arthur' shows a waning of influence, with Scargill's position being reduced until it is secured by the introduction of 'Margaret of St Francis', albeit with Scargill now in a subservient position. Thatcher's appearance in the poem ends the verse and explicitly positions Scargill in relation to Thatcher, thereby moderating our understanding of what has come before. It is Thatcher who is given the final 'say'. The spectre of Thatcher that inevitably hangs behind any discussion of Arthur Scargill is realised and 'Arthur' is enveloped by it, never to be mentioned again in the poem. MacSweeney's work, however, very rarely submits to such neat assertions. Not only is a 'model' something to imitate, but it is something which is itself an imitation, a replica or approximation of the thing itself and the act through which something is fashioned or shaped. The poem tells us that Margaret Thatcher is a 'model', a construction, and this is made all the more apparent through the name 'Margaret of St Francis' which is MacSweeney's own invention. We are aware of the contrivance of the poem and of the naming of Thatcher in relation to 'St Francis', but it is only in hindsight—'model' coming after the references to Scargill—that MacSweeney draws attention to the original 'model' and equal contrivance of the names 'King Arthur' and 'Arthur'. MacSweeney is highlighting the performativity of the poem and that of the cultural history that it draws from and contributes to, in a form not dissimilar to Bentley in 'The Two Magicians'. The references that MacSweeney embeds within the poem highlight the issues inherent when labour histories emerge and the struggles with contending with already established narratives: how are they shaped and how do they shape our understanding? Through the act of naming in the poem, MacSweeney is constantly fashioning and shaping our responses to Scargill and Thatcher, even while telling us that what we are reading is itself a selective 'history'. MacSweeney presents our labour narratives as constructions, constructions that have only the appearance of inevitability.

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(Boseley 2010; Laurance 2012).

Although O'Brien's *The Frighteners* (1987) includes a number of poems that allude to the miners' strike 1984-5, only 'Unregistered' directly mentions Arthur Scargill. O'Brien does not refer to Arthur Scargill by his full name, or even by his surname 'Scargill', or by the laudatory (and/or ironic) 'King Arthur'—as in Barry MacSweeney's 'John Bunyan to Johnny Rotten'—but with the altogether more reserved title of 'Mr Scargill'.

O'Brien's 'Unregistered' continues the idea I draw attention to in MacSweeney's work in Chapter Two in regards to how dominant forces seek to control our access to information and, as a result, shape our narratives. 'Unregistered' recounts the plan by the Conservative government, originally outlined in 1977's leaked Ridley Report and instigated during the 1984-5 strike, to import foreign coal with the intended effect of undermining the NUM's (and the striking miners') efforts to blockade the movement of coal around the UK.¹³ The poem's title plays on notions of authority, the power of the 'official', but also the power of absence. The term 'unregistered' functions in a number of ways: 'unregistered' suggests an awareness of a thing's existence, but a lack of official documentation to confirm its 'official reality'; 'unregistered' is the intentional avoidance of registration, where there ought to be a record of an item's existence; 'unregistered' can also be the documentation that confirms something's lack of registration or, more tellingly for the many miners who were blacklisted after the 1984-5 strike, the confirmation of the removal of their registration. In all situations, these acts of registering are performed by someone in a position of authority. The title of the poem echoes the view behind the final two lines of O'Brien's 'Summertime'—also from *The Frighteners*—where he writes, '*That kind of thing can't happen here / And when it does it isn't true*' (1987, 18). During the strike, there was officially no coal being imported into the UK.¹⁴ In the same way, the blacklisting of workers was also denied.

Each of the poem's four stanzas opens with the phrase 'Six cranes'. The 'six cranes' appear in every stanza until we come to expect them. We come to accept their existence and their presence in the poem.

¹³ The report was produced by Conservative MP Nicholas Ridley and outlined the ways in which a Conservative government would be able to defeat another union uprising through the denationalisation of British industry and services.

¹⁴ There was. See footnote 24, Chapter Two.

Yet, it is not until the final stanza that the purpose of the cranes is revealed:

Six Cranes where Baltic vessels come
With coal to break the strike.

*'Does Mr Scargill think we think
The revolution starts like this?'*

(O'Brien 1987, 23)

Joseph Brooker suggests that the italicised lines are the words of, 'we may guess, a Baltic seaman', who is sardonically posing the question with a tone of 'mocking brutality [...] especially as the poem appeared after the strike's failure' (2010, 89). I am inclined to agree with Brooker's reading of the question as being asked 'sardonically', particularly as a result of the mockingly employed title of 'Mr'. However, although one reading is of a 'Baltic seaman' asking the question to Scargill, it appears to be a much broader 'we' than Brooker posits. Here, the 'we' could be seen as speaking for the NUM members for whom the strike proved to be a false dawn, the British public at large, who by the end of the strike had generally turned on Scargill, or, most persuasively, Thatcher's government. If 'we' is the NUM members and trade unionists more broadly, the question ceases to be mocking and becomes one of disillusionment and discontent.

Between the end of the miners' strike 1984-5 and the publication of the poem in 1987, thirty-nine collieries had closed down in the UK at the cost of around 39,000 jobs, many of which would have been the jobs of striking miners (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2015). Within this climate of job losses, the question '*Does Mr Scargill think we think / The revolution starts like this*', if posed by former miners, takes on a tone whereby they have lost faith in Scargill. The implication being that although Scargill continues to preach 'revolution', those that had followed him no longer believe in the project, or they have simply become disheartened after a year of striking only to find that their jobs are still at risk. The 'Mr' establishes a distance and level of formality between the 'we' asking the question and Scargill. The 'we' is moving away from the Scargill. This title ('Mr') is not necessarily mocking, however, but perhaps more a form of deference. Although the questioning 'we' may not be following Scargill any longer, there is still a level of respect intimated for this most staunch of trade union champions. What Scargill had achieved is not completely forgotten. Conversely, if we read the question as being posed by the state and/or Conservative government—particularly by Margaret Thatcher—the use of 'Mr' becomes nothing but mockery. Here the use of 'Mr' sits uncomfortably and becomes a title by which to ridicule Scargill, by the act of paying false deference to him. The title elevates Scargill to a position outside and away from his union members (and to an extent the working class he 'represents')

and is employed to facilitate the discreditation of Scargill's thinking. The implication is that a man in 'Mr' Scargill's position should not hold the beliefs or think the things that he does. The line becomes one where Scargill is shown to be lacking the intellect required to be taken seriously and, as such, is rendered irrelevant. Not only is Scargill's thinking flawed, but his 'questionable' thinking about others—'we'—shows him to be 'disorientated', politically, socially and intellectually, depending on who we deem to be speaking. The rhetorical question makes Scargill's reply irrelevant. The poem does not allow him the space to respond. In this sense, the 'we' is both the government's reply and the government speaking on behalf of and to a broader public, questioning the intelligence of those who would wish to follow Scargill. The repetition of 'think' in the penultimate line separates the thinking of Scargill, the singular, from the thinking of the 'we', the masses, or 'we' the government. In the poem, after the strike of 1984-5, Scargill is no longer representing a mass, at least that is what we are being told. The questioner is depicting Scargill as only representing himself.

Turning back to the poem's title, it is only the state who can register and 'unregister', as they see fit. If we take the final two lines as spoken by Margaret Thatcher or the state, those lines become their registering of a response to the rest of the poem's claims of 'Baltic vessels' coming to 'break the strike'. The state does this by ignoring these claims and shifting the focus on to Scargill's failings, and discrediting his views. While the state is allowed to register a final response, the poem ends before Scargill has a chance to respond. There is a response from Scargill, absence. He has been curtailed or not given the platform to speak. The title comes into focus and it is Scargill's response that is 'unregistered', it is not officially recognised, it is not included in the narrative. The narrative is completely constructed by the state. The speaker mimics the form of a conversation, while delivering both question and answer. The poem doesn't tell us what Scargill thinks, but we are told what others *believe* Scargill thinks. And, as a corollary, how 'we' should think about what Scargill thinks. The state registers its response in the form of a question that never requires an answer. The voices of those being spoken for are also 'unregistered'. The only voices we have are from those with the platform to tell the public what they—the public—(should) think. The oppositional has been scored from the poem. The labour narrative is solely controlled by the 'dominant' cultural elements.

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In the work of Steve Ely, there are a considerably greater number of references to Arthur Scargill (and Margaret Thatcher). In his poems, there is a consideration of the ways alternative voices can challenge dominant narratives, yet also the ways these voices can be silenced. Ely's debut collection, *Oswald's Book of Hours*, includes a poem entitled 'Arthur Scargill', in a section of the book titled 'Memorial of the Saints'. The back cover of *Oswald* describes the volume as being 'written in the voices of an unlikely band of northern subversives, including NUM leader Arthur Scargill, hermit Richard Rolle, brigand John Nevison, Catholic rebel Robert Aske' (Ely 2013). This statement is somewhat misleading as it is only Robert Aske of the four whose 'voice' we hear—in the poem '*Incipit euangelium secundum Robert Aske*'. The other three 'subversives' each have poems bearing their name (plus another poem for Robert Aske) in 'Memorials', but these poems are not written in their voices.

Memorials are established to institute an act of remembering, or not forgetting. They are as much about the act of commemoration as they are the person or thing being remembered or commemorated. As Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman contend in their work on public memorials, 'memorials are places for social actors and groups to debate and negotiate the right to decide what is commemorated and what version of the past will be made visible to the public' (2008, 171). Memorials constitute a visible 'face' of how a history is told. What becomes memorialised is that which has been chosen to be worthy of memorialisation, the narrative that is deemed 'correct', the faces that fit. However, unlike the other members of the 'unlikely band' and the figures that make up the thirteen 'saints', Arthur Scargill is still alive (and exists).¹⁵ Scargill has been memorialised by Ely before he has passed away.

Although the poem is titled 'Arthur Scargill', the 'character' of Scargill never appears, he is simply spoken about as 'you'. We have no mention of Scargill's strike action or his relationship to the NUM, and it is not until the twelfth line of the sonnet that he is referenced: 'You brought them health and Palma de

¹⁵ The other saints are: Wayne Johnson—who according to Ely is 'a fictionalised portrayal of Billy Whitehurst, a South Yorkshire born footballer (Hull City, Newcastle United, Sheffield United and Oxford United), whose on-field physicality and penchant for off-field mayhem gained him the reputation as "England's hardest footballer" during the 1980s and 90s' (2016b, 5); Dismas the Good Thief—one of the two thieves being crucified along with Jesus Christ; John Ball (1338-1381)—a priest who was a part of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381; John Nevison (1639-1684)—a famous highwayman; Joseph the Dreamer—a character from Genesis who could predict the future; Michael the Archangel; Mary Magdalene; Paul—the apostle; Richard Rolle (1290-1349)—hermit and mystic; Robert Aske (1500-1537)—leader of a rebellion who was executed by Henry VIII; Robenhode—Robin Hood; Oswald—King of Northumbria.

Mallorca, / Cortinas on the drive and kids in college, / reading Marx and Mao and *The Wealth of Nations*' (Ely 2013, 71). Here, the idea of the poem as 'memorial' can be witnessed. The memorial is being used to commemorate a different, non strike, aspect of Scargill's legacy. Ely memorialises the influence that Scargill had on the quality of life for those in the mining industry. Ely separates Scargill from the legacy of strike action and politicking which so often obscures any further discussion of Scargill's influence. What Ely does instead is open the poem by foregrounding the plight of workers, by highlighting their narratives and legacies—'The lowest of the low and low-paid, / the primary men; farmhands, quarrymen, *colliers*' (2013, 71). By structuring the sonnet in this fashion, Ely situates Scargill, and as a corollary his actions during the miners' strikes of the 1970s and 1980s, as a *result of* the horrendous conditions faced by many, particularly miners—'Crushed torsos under splintered / chocks, amputation on the maingate rip, / blood-streaked phlegm hocked-up' (2013, 71). These 'conditions', be they chronic illness or accident, are all largely avoidable and exist only as a result of the miners' working conditions. There is a tension here between the work of mining essentially killing the workers, yet also being the facilitation for a 'better', albeit largely consumerist, lifestyle. The poem suggests that the worst thing about being exploited in a capitalist system is not simply the physical and mental 'oppression' of said system, but not being able to take part in the consumer benefits which that system creates. The final line shifts to set Scargill as a product of Karl Marx, Mao Zedong and Adam Smith. By leaving these three figures as the final reference points of the sonnet, and omitting Scargill's name from the poem proper, Ely makes Scargill as 'man' less important than the ideologies that drove his actions. Nevertheless, this poem is a 'memorial' to the 'saint' Arthur Scargill and that memorial is being delivered to Arthur Scargill, the addressed 'you'. There is a need to memorialise Scargill. The legacy of Scargill needs to be rendered in stone so that it is not forgotten. We usually memorialise the dead. Scargill is still alive and the implication is that his ideas and political 'power' have passed away, but still they need to be recognised. By ending with the names and works of three revolutionary writers in a poem about the hardships of labour, Ely is attempting to return their ideas to the labouring classes, using Arthur Scargill as a model by which to do so. Socialist learning, against Benjamin Kunkel's comment that socialist learning has become 'a hobby of rich people's children' (2014, 64), is returned to those who drive 'cortinas' and have come to be excluded from the 'academic' spaces in which people read 'Marx and Mao and *The Wealth of Nations*'. Yet, through all of this, it is still Scargill's name at the top of the page. Scargill is the figure that 'permits' the discussion of these labour narratives. Although the political concerns of the poem seem to exceed Scargill, he is the gateway through which the working classes can access their labour histories.

In Ely's follow-up collection, *England*, Arthur Scargill is directly referenced in five of the poems: 'Ballad

of the Scabs', 'The Ballad of Dave Hart', 'One of Us', 'Nithing' and the playlet 'Scum of the Earth'. In this section of the chapter, I will explore how Ely uses naming to demonstrate the ways 'effective dominant cultures' seek to incorporate or discredit alternative labour narratives and how these narratives attempt to resist incorporation.

The title of the poem 'One of Us', although it asserts membership of a collective, also suggests a pull between the notions of being part of a collective and yet, being the representative for that group: the 'one of us' who is remembered or the 'one of us' who can affect change. In 'One of Us', we have Ely's only mention of Arthur Scargill as the mythical 'King Arthur'. Yet, there is something of a tension between Scargill as 'king' and the claiming of Scargill as 'us':

[...] Cecil, with his boyish smile, brylcreemed hair,
and a side-parting to set your watch to.
A Carnforth railman's lad, hauled himself up
by his eh-bah-gum braces, grammar school,
Cambridge, millionaire, Tory MP.
Then Chairman of the Party v Arthur Scargill
on Question Time. King Arthur, the Cossack-quiffed
syndicalist from nah-then-lad Worsborough [*sic*] Dale,
President of the NUM via White Cross
Secondary Modern, Woolley Pit and the diehard
red-raggers of Yorkshire, the real Yorkshire, [...]
(Ely 2015, 120)

The 'Cecil' referenced in the quotation is Cecil Parkinson, who held the position of Chairman of the Conservative Party between 1981-1983.¹⁶ On a purely historical note, although Arthur Scargill and Cecil Parkinson both appeared on *Question Time* a number of times—Scargill nine and Parkinson eleven—they were never to appear on the same episode. This staging of Scargill and Parkinson is, in effect, a fabrication by Ely, with the aim of bringing these two figures onto the 'stage' where they can be used as counterpoints to one another. The line 'Then Chairman of the Party v Arthur Scargill' echoes Harrison's 'vs'— 'man v. wife, / Communist v. Fascist, Left v. Right / class v. class as bitter as before' (2008, 11)—and, accordingly, places the poem as part of a longer poetic 'narrative' of strike literature. The 'v' also creates a dialectic which contrasts with the Thatcher/Scargill 'dialogue' of MacSweeney's and Bentley's work.

¹⁶ Cecil Parkinson had served as the first Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in Thatcher's government in 1983, a position that was an amalgam of the roles of Secretary of State for Trade and Secretary of State for Industry. Parkinson was replaced less than six months after taking the position by Norman Tebbit. Parkinson resigned his post in October 1983 after details of an affair he'd been having with his secretary, and her subsequent pregnancy, were revealed (Grice 2016).

Ely's driving interest seems to lie within the concept of institutional systems and the relationship between those systems and a personal politics. Cecil Parkinson appears on 'Question Time' as 'Chairman of the Party', a representative of a system of politics which he has helped shape and disseminate. Parkinson was elected as a Tory MP, but Chairman of the Party is a position and title bestowed upon him. Conversely, Scargill appears as 'Arthur Scargill', his allegiances to the NUM portrayed as secondary to his politics. Scargill is one man against the 'Party'. Arthur Scargill is included in the poem under the steam of his legacy and name, whereas Cecil Parkinson, referred to initially in the poem as 'Cecil'—a tactic which serves to confer a fake tone of familiarity based on their shared working-class roots—requires justification for his inclusion, which he receives when Ely elucidates that he was '*then* Chairman of the Party'. Cecil Parkinson's justification comes from a position he held over 30 years ago. Scargill's comes from the weight his name still carries. Even the structure Ely has employed to describe the two characters places them at odds with one another. Parkinson's potted biography traces a relatively chronological and conservatively 'meritocratic' path from his own working-class beginnings—'railman's lad'—through his education, to his position in the Conservative party—'grammar school, / Cambridge, millionaire, Tory MP' (Ely 2015, 120). Scargill's history starts with him on 'Question Time', before shifting to the exalted 'King Arthur', through to his political views ('syndicalist'), his birthplace and his position within the National Union of Mineworkers, before returning to his education and work life—'via White Cross / Secondary Modern, Woolley Pit and the diehard / red-raggers of Yorkshire' (Ely 2015, 120). Cecil Parkinson's rise to the position of 'Chairman of the Party' comes through decisions which distance him from his working-class roots and situate him among an ever-decreasing circle of people of increasing power and influence, of which the Tory party is its 'logical' conclusion. 'Cecil' is left behind and what remains is a system into which he is drawn. However, Ely's Scargill is from 'Worsborough Dale', while *also* being 'President of the NUM'. If Parkinson is presented as leaving behind 'Carnforth' and his 'eh-bah-gum' accent for 'learned RP' (Ely 2015, 120), Scargill's 'Worsborough Dale' is intrinsically tied up in his position as 'King Arthur' and 'President of the NUM'. Scargill's position and 'valorisation' come 'via' his work experiences, not at the expense of his 'people'. For Ely, Scargill speaks in '*our* [emphasis added] flat South Riding vowels' with 'consonants blunt as cobbles, arguments sharp as a diamond bit' (2015, 120). Parkinson's language is one of 'learned' experience, but it is a language from which place has been scored. Scargill's language is one that comes imbued with a sense of place and experience which allows his 'legacy' to speak to broader labour narratives.

As Rick Rylance states in his work on Tony Harrison, 'language itself is often described as in crisis, partly because of its deep connection with social power' (1991, 53). Rylance goes no further in elucidating

what it is he means by 'crisis'; however, here, we might read 'crisis' as a move away from a totalising concept of language—language as 'an integrated whole, harmonious and reconciling' (Rylance 1991, 53)—to one that bears witness to, and is complicit in shaping, constructions of meaning. These meanings are in a form of suspension, caught in the tension between language's ability to challenge and perpetuate forms of 'social power', often simultaneously. In Ely, this tension is evident in 'Chairman of the Party v Arthur Scargill'. The 'confrontation' between Parkinson and Scargill establishes a situation where the 'social power' and legacy of each is being challenged and perpetuated. Williams suggests that it is in these 'critical encounters' that certain words and 'meanings are offered, felt for, tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified, changed' (1989, 12). Crucially, none of these language 'modifications' exclude the others. This allows us to think through the dynamics of 'social power' without dismissing the tensions that arise from and by language acts. Continuing with Harrison for a moment, this connection between social power and language is most explicitly confronted in the poem 'Them & [uz]', in which a school teacher informs Harrison of the 'correct' way to read Shakespeare:

"Poetry's the speech of kings. You're one of those
Shakespeare gives the comic bit to: prose!
All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see
's been dubbed by [ʌs] into RP,
Received Pronunciation, pleased believe [ʌs]
Your speech is in the hands of the receivers."
(1995, 33)

The final line from the quotation presents the tension of 'social power' between a 'receiver' as being one who accepts (or is forced to accept) that which has been delivered to them, and a 'receiver' as one appointed to manage the affairs of a business that is 'in crisis'. Even if the speech or language is your own, it is not you who is the sole manager of it. Language is also mediated through 'statal' authority and the culture of the receiver. With these concepts of mediation and 'social power' in mind, what Ely does is present a poem in which the 'speech of kings' is not simply the language of poetry but the language of a particular 'King', Arthur Scargill. The dominant 'social power' within the poem is that of the working classes, particularly those of 'the real Yorkshire' (2015, 120). Williams claims that 'it is a fact about the modes of domination, that they select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice' (1977, 125). 'Social power' and cultural 'modes of domination' are not the same thing: social power can exist on a micro or macro scale and is prone to shift, whereas 'modes of domination' are, while still prone to shifting, much more encompassing. Ely registers the 'modes of domination' by opening the poem with the representative of the domination (and a reference to Thatcher)—'The good looking,

charming man Margaret / always had a soft spot for' (2015, 120). Yet, Ely situates social power with the 'oppositional' groups, and registers 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs' (Williams 1977, 132). Scargill's appearance on 'Question Time' is used as a platform for the oppositional. Scargill's speech inspires the narrator to join the 'CND, Anti-Nazi League / and the Socialist Workers Party', and has such an impact that the poem ends with a pledge of everlasting patronage, 'Arthur Scargill / We'll support you evermore' (Ely 2015, 120-121). Although laudatory, there is still a tension with the ostensibly singular voice of the poem speaking for, but not necessarily as, a 'we'. The chant for Scargill in these final lines increases this tension. The chant 'we'll support you evermore' is to the tune of 'Bread of Heaven', a hymn about a pilgrim requiring God's guidance.¹⁷ Nowadays, the tune is more familiar as the football chant 'you're not singing anymore'. Although the words of the chant indicate a continuation of support, the tune suggests this support to be lacking. A chant allows individual voices to disappear, while requiring a certain form of consensus to continue. By the end of the poem, who is this 'we'? In an inverse of Mort's 'Scab' and Harrison's 'V', where the final lines of the poem position the reader as 'you', Ely's 'we' claims the reader and forces them into a position where they have to 'announce' their own support for Scargill. Currently, there are only a few people who directly support Scargill, and it is not too strong to say that Arthur Scargill plays almost no active role in modern British politics. The NUM Scargill once helmed, and is now 'Honorary President' of, 'has just 100 active members' (McCarthy 2016), and the Socialist Labour Party he leads has 'around 300' (Harris 2014). The 'we' in the poem becomes co-opted into Ely's political history and implicated in Scargill's fall from prominence. He is now in need of support, yet this support is not forthcoming.¹⁸ 'We'll support you evermore' is exposed as rhetoric. The poem's line break separates Scargill from the pledge of support. 'Will' becomes a claim for some future support that may never come and the word 'evermore' that closes the poem tails off into the blank page without substantiating Ely's claim of further support. Ely's return to the use of Scargill's full name in the closing of the poem points towards a public consciousness in which the name 'Arthur' is no longer enough to connote Scargill and it becomes necessary for 'Arthur Scargill' to be spelled out in full, even when talking to those that support him. If there are any supporters left, they are supporting a legacy that is fading.

¹⁷ The hymn was also used in the score for the movie *How Green Was My Valley*, which is about life in the South Wales coal mines.

¹⁸ This support may well also be in reference to the legal battles that Scargill had been fighting with the NUM pertaining to a flat that was being paid for by the Union: 'We now know, for example, that until late 2012, the NUM paid £34,000 a year in rent for his council flat in the Barbican in London – and that in 1993, he tried to use the Right to Buy scheme pioneered by Thatcher to buy it. Scargill says that if he had succeeded, the property would have been eventually returned to the union; the NUM's leadership insists there is no evidence to back up this claim' (Harris 2016; 'Arthur Scargill Loses London Flat Case' 2012).

However, this usage of 'Arthur Scargill' being necessitated by a lack of public awareness does not hold true through Ely's other poems in *Englaland*. In 'Ballad of the Scabs', there is a clear political distance between 'Arthur Scargill' and 'Scargill'. It is 'Arthur Scargill' who 'saw it true' and said that the Conservatives would 'destroy our jobs and communities' (Ely 2015, 137), yet it is 'Scargill' who is on the receiving end of a lawsuit:

Sir Hector Laing stumped up some cash
Lord Hanson stumped up more
they served a writ on Scargill
on the Labour Conference floor.

A firm of Tory lawyers
deployed the state machine
and outlawed Scargill and the NUM
to the silence of the TUC.

(Ely 2015, 139)¹⁹

In contrast to the honorifics of Sir Hector Laing and Lord Hanson, Scargill is presented without a title. It is clear that it is 'Arthur Scargill' who is to be venerated as an icon of political foresight and 'Scargill' who is a member of the trade union movement and 'one of us', precisely because he doesn't have a title. Similarly, in 'The Ballad of Dave Hart', Hart is spoken of as "'the man who broke the NUM / and Arthur Scargill's power'" (Ely 2015, 122).²⁰ There is a prestige in breaking 'Arthur Scargill's power' which would not be there with 'Scargill'. In 'Ballad of the Scabs', Hector Laing and James Hanson, both of whom were businessmen and Conservative party supporters/financial backers—Laing also acting as the party treasurer in the late-1980s—are referred to by their 'official' honorifics, 'Sir' and 'Lord', respectively. By reducing Arthur Scargill's full name to only 'Scargill', and avoiding the 'King' designation he had employed in 'One of Us', Ely is setting up a clear demarcation between those indebted to the state, who are part of a dominant (possibly archaic) cultural order, and those who are 'reduced' by it. ('Scargill', or at least Mr.

¹⁹ Laing and Hanson were instrumental in helping to finance what would become the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, a group that was comprised of 'dissident' miners (Milne 2014, 325).

²⁰ Hart was one of the main organisers and financial backers of the back-to-work movement during the 1984-5 strike, and was responsible for touring 'mining areas in a Mercedes driven by his chauffeur' and 'organizing a network of disaffected and strikebreaking miners' (Milne 2014, 324). Hart had also planned and was granted planning permission to build a '23ft gold-tipped Egyptian-style' pyramid shaped mausoleum out of stone, glass and gold, in the grounds of his home, Chadacre Hall (Watson-Smyth 2000). Unfortunately, according to a local newspaper article from when the house was sold in 2010, the pyramid was never completed (Goss 2010).

Scargill, is also the way a defendant in court would be addressed.) The 'state' gives to Laing and Hanson, but takes away from Arthur Scargill. For Laing and Hanson, Scargill is never and could never be 'King'. Ely is commenting on the archaic practice of ascribing honorifics, while tying Scargill's (and the NUM's) opposition to the state with a longer narrative of state authority and oppression. Along with the honorifics, Ely's use of the relatively archaic 'writ', as a synonym for 'summons', places the act of serving the 'writ', and the laws by which it could be allowed to be delivered, as anachronistic. Scargill is an 'outlaw', positioning him alongside 'Robenhode' (as seen in *Oswalds*), where he comes to represent the battle over class politics.

In the playlet 'Scum of the Earth', Ely has two of these members of the nobility, 'Arthur Wellesley, Field Marshal His Grace the First Duke of Wellington' and 'Peter Benjamin, The Right Honourable Lord Mandelson of Foy in the County of Hereford, and Hartlepool in the County of Durham' competing for the 'affections' of a 'Chorus of the Swinish Multitude'²¹ before a 'momentous battle in a second English Civil War' (Ely 2015, 43).²² The specificity of their titles, albeit correctly ascribed when referring to Wellesley and Mandelson—how they are then referred to in the rest of the 'play'—against the homogenised and derogatory 'swinish multitude', continues Ely's interrogation in *Englaland* of authority and rhetoric through the manipulation of naming. Mandelson rallies his troops of 'consumers and customers, stakeholders in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland PLC' with cries of capitalism and free marketeering, in line with New Labour's own political 'vision' (Ely 2015, 44); whereas Wellesley promises 'England for the English' and a future filled with 'freebooting, fighting and the fancy' (Ely 2015, 50, 54). The play finally comes to a close with the 'swines' 'recognising their common identity and interests and turning on those 'who keep us irate / on jingo and hate' (Ely 2015, 57, 59).

It is 'Scargill', along with others, who is on two occasions employed by Mandelson as a symbol of a backwards-looking and more barbarous Britain. The first instance of Scargill's naming has Mandelson proclaiming that, '*Maggie. Minden. Maldon. Their past is past, / like sturgeon, Scargill and jobs-for-life: / their future belongs to us*' (Ely 2015, 47).²³ Margaret Thatcher is placed alongside the Battle of Minden,

²¹ The idea of the 'Chorus' and how it comes to both include and exclude voices is explored in Chapter Four, with specific reference to Bentley's 'The Two Magicians'.

²² In the 2001 UK General Election, Peter Mandelson (Labour) and Arthur Scargill (SLP) both contested the electoral seat for Hartlepool. Mandelson won with 59.1% of the vote (22,506 of 38,051 total votes cast), Scargill came fourth with only 2.4% (912 votes). Second and third positions were the Conservative, Gus Robinson, and the Liberal Democrat, Nigel Boddy, respectively ('Vote 2001: Results and Constituencies: Hartlepool' 2001).

²³ The slogan, 'the future belongs to us', is traditionally one that has been employed by fascists. The earliest usage I can find is from an interview given by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1908 to *Century Magazine* (Hale 2014). The slogan has also been used by Donald Trump at a recent Conservative Political Action Group conference (Smith & Siddiqui

fought in 1759, and the Battle of Maldon, 991 CE. Interestingly, the poems ‘recounting’ these battles, Rudyard Kipling’s ‘The Men that fought at Minden’ and the Old English poem ‘The Battle of Maldon’, are many people’s introduction to the battles themselves. In reference to the Battle of Maldon, ‘the poem is our only detailed source’, so much so that much of our historical knowledge of the battle actually originates from the poem itself (Dean 1992, 100).²⁴ This statement obviously comes with its own set of assumptions, the first being that a poem can work as a ‘reliable historical document’, as asserted by Frank Stenton in his book *Anglo-Saxon England* (Stenton in Dean 1992, 100). Poems are not a history, but they can be part of a narrative. However, as Paul Dean goes on to claim, ‘even if the poem could be shown to be of the late tenth century it would still be apparent that the society and social codes it reflects are fabricated’ and that the poem may have no historical ‘status in relation to the events it describes, although it may be valuable evidence for the ideas of literary decorum current at the time of its own composition’ (1992, 100). In terms of my argument, it is not simply that these social codes are ‘fabricated’, but that the poems reveal something about how and why these codes come to be established. Similarly, Kipling’s poem, ‘The Men that fought at Minden’, has the subtitle, ‘In the Lodge of Instruction’. The poem comes from the voice of an experienced Army recruit who is advising a group of new trainees on the decorums of the British Army, while recounting, and forgetting, details of those who fought at the Battle of Minden.²⁵ While the title suggests this ‘lodge’ to be a space of ‘instruction’, our ‘instruction’ and introduction to the battle are flawed, yet the instruction is supported by the speaker’s supposed authority as an experienced military recruit. Ely’s inclusion of these two battles or poems in ‘Scum’ raises questions of how we create histories and suggests that art, in this instance poetry, can play a role in, and is complicit in, informing these narratives. If we return to the Dean quotations, we can see that Ely is highlighting the ‘fabricated’ nature of social codes, and the folly of attempting to read concretising narratives from poems. As well as the simply alliterative quality, by placing ‘*Maggie*’ alongside ‘*Minden*’ and ‘*Maldon*’, not only is Thatcher aligned with notions of war and conquest, but of having a history that is itself informed as much by cultural products and ‘second-hand’ narratives, as it is informed by her actions. As ‘*Maggie. Minden. Maldon*’ are italicised, although under the banner of being spoken by Mandelson, it suggests they are being spoken from an ‘outside’. This ‘outside’ is both

2017).

²⁴ Both Janet Cooper—*The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*—and Donald Scragg—*The Battle of Maldon AD. 991*—have edited essay collections that contend with the poem’s position as major source for our historical knowledge of the battle. The battle, between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes (Vikings), led to a defeat of the Anglo-Saxons and was part of a larger power shift in the Britain away from the Anglo-Saxons towards the Danes (Jones 1992).

²⁵ It is interesting to note that a ‘lodge of instruction’ is also the place in which the secretive, and source of innumerable conspiracy theories regarding their alleged influence on world history, Freemasons rehearse their rituals (de Castella 2012).

Mandelson mocking the 'swines', but also a bastardisation of the oft-used '*Maggie. Maggie. Maggie. Out. Out. Out*' chant. Altering the 'lyrics' of the chant questions the nature of such rhetoric, but also the ease with which groups from outside traditionally socially 'dominant' groups can have their language co-opted and appropriated by groups and individuals that do not represent them. However, it is Wellesley who first utters the name 'Maggie' to his troops with the rhetorical question, 'Is this the England of Maggie and Mafeking, / Waterloo and Winston, Dunkirk and Drake?' (Ely 2015, 47). Wellesley's utterance is one intending to inspire his troops and has at its heart an aspiration to return to the 'social codes' that these historical figures and events, and their associations with war and nationalism, are envisioned as representing. While Mandelson's '*Maggie*' is as a mocking response to Wellesley's speech, both speeches show a political figurehead telling the populace, regardless of which 'side' they are on, which parts of their cultural history *should* hold meaning for them. Whether this cultural history requires a re-approximation (Wellesley) or a negation (Mandelson) of cultural histories (and characters or events) is less significant than the essential struggle over the modes by which dominant, and, as a consequence, oppositional, elements of culture can be controlled. Ely is critiquing both Wellesley and Mandelson's 'views' in 'Scum'. He is presenting apparently contrasting modes of rhetoric to show them both to be wanting. This rhetoric proves so inadequate that at one point 'a swine' is forced to ask, perplexed, what 'the fuck's he on about?' (Ely 2015, 49). The 'multitude' are confused by both the rhetoric and the retelling of their own histories.

As Mandelson refers to Scargill, even while telling us his 'past is past', we are left with questions concerning what it means to construct labour histories and the ways in which inclusion or exclusion from dominant labour narratives can be manipulated to serve a particular political end. If 'their past is past', for the likes of 'sturgeon, Scargill and jobs-for-life', why need we be reminded of it? (Ely 2015, 47).²⁶ Reiterating the end of, or claims for, something's supposed demise suggests a fear that the thing professed to be obsolete may not be so. Conversely, it is an attempt to renew an anxiety about returning to a version of the past deemed to be contemptible by some. In 'Scum', Mandelson's second invocation

²⁶ The inclusion of 'sturgeon' here I see as having three possible interpretations. Firstly, the sturgeon is, according to the Marine Conservation Society, a critically endangered species in the UK. Secondly, along with whales, sturgeon are a royal fish, meaning that any sturgeon landed in UK waters becomes the property of the Queen (Marine Conservation Society). This reading could align with Mandelson's calls for a more internationalised Britain, away from archaic practices and traditional monarchy, in favour of globalised capitalism. Thirdly, it may also be a reference to First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon. However, *Englaland* was only published in the early part of 2015, not long after Sturgeon had taken over the SNP—Scottish National Party—and before the 2015 UK elections in which she came to wider prominence in England. Yet, as leader of a party that actively campaigned for Scotland to become independent from the UK, Sturgeon would go against the character 'Mandelson's' desire for 'One World, a global, mobile citizenry / united in common humanity only' (Ely 2015, 48-49).

of Scargill appears to lean towards the latter reading:

And there we have it. The England of Scargill
and Ian Stuart Donaldson via F-Troop
and Harry the Dog. Grisly as Griffin,
gruesome as Galloway - dead as Dave Nellist.
(Ely 2015, 52)

Scargill's name is used as the figurehead for a list that includes: a white supremacist—'Ian Stuart Donaldson', lead singer of Screwdriver, a white-power band; England's most notorious football hooligan firm and one of their 'stars'—'F-troop / and Harry the Dog'; the ex-leader of the far-right British National Party—Nick 'Griffin'; leader of the now dissolved far-left Respect party and media personality—George 'Galloway'; and a deceased Labour MP who was the Chair of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition—'Dave Nellist'. It is clear that what Mandelson is proposing is a form of moderate, centrist politics, one that excludes the more 'radical' factions of the political spectrum. The inclusion of Scargill in this list positions him as a political extremist and an icon and template for political demagoguery in the UK. While Mandelson attempts to position the 'characters' of the poem together, he is undermined by the line breaks that refuse such lazy association. Scargill is left alone on his line. However, the fact that Mandelson conjures these names into a single space seeds the idea that these people *should* be considered together and, perhaps, even have something in common. It shows how our narratives can come to populated by figures and ideas that have no place in them. What Ely is evoking is a form of populist rhetoric that would seek to flatten political difference and homogenise our narratives. Yet, Ely is without doubt an advocate of Scargill. Ely's invocation of Scargill works not only as a critique, but as a comment on the political and cultural impact Scargill has had. It is the 'England of Scargill' foremost, the other 'characters' are secondary.²⁷ Mandelson is unintentionally reinvoking Scargill's 'legacy' through the act of trying to silence the legacy he believes Scargill has left behind. The 'others' are referred to by their full names or are given alliterative nicknames to remind the audience, both the 'swinish multitude' and the reader, of who they are and why they 'matter'. And while Nick Griffin and George Galloway endure a bastardisation from Mandelson, Scargill is there through the cultural weight of his surname. We see the beginnings of the naming tropes Ely employs in 'Ballad of the Scabs', where the figure of 'Scargill' is castigated by the state. This castigation serves to demonstrate the levels of (attempted) control perpetrated by the state in regards to political 'dissent' and suggests a fear that comes from the influence and legacy of Scargill.

²⁷ The 'England of Scargill' echoes Ely's other calls to 'King Arthur' through *Englaland* by going so far as to (at a stretch) give him the political 'keys to the realm'.

Beyond these ideas regarding naming in 'Scum', the most salient issue that is addressed through Mandelson's speech is the ease by which complex political systems and viewpoints can be reduced to an overly simplistic form of 'identifier' politics. Without elaborating on who the figures are or why they are included in the 'England of Scargill', there is an attempt by Mandelson to present these 'characters' and their politics as politically comparable. They simply are not. At the end of his speech, Mandelson tells his audience that our 'nation can be whatever we want it to be' (Ely 2015, 53). If something can be 'whatever we want', it both implies a lack of restriction and also a lack of direction in the outcome. Ely is presenting a type of rhetorical populism through Mandelson. Mandelson telling his audience that *our* 'nation' can be anything comes after a detailed list of what we *should* be celebrating, a form of globalised capitalism: 'the City and our blue-chip exports - / global warming, Coldplay, Wallace & Gromit' (Ely 2015, 53). Moreover, a nation being 'whatever we want it to be' means that our histories can also be whatever we want them to be. The fact that 'Scum of the Earth' is a play, albeit one that appears in a collection of poetry, indicates an essential link between rhetoric—the fact that plays are to be performed to an audience—and how political ideas and histories come to exist and be disseminated. Wellesley and Mandelson construct their histories along different lines, yet use them in homologous ways to garner support from a populace. Placing Wellesley and Mandelson together in the work directs our attention to the ways that political narratives succumb to manipulation, and how the selective practices that go into constructing these narratives work to justify a political present.

I would like to end this discussion of Ely with a reading of the poem 'Nothing'. The poem opens by welcoming us to 'the Theatre of Hate', which consists of:

Harold, the English King;
William, Duke of Normandy;
Arthur, President of the NUM;
Ian, Chairman of the NCB, and;
Margaret, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of
 Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
 (Ely 2015, 124)

Ely's inclusion of William the Conqueror and Harold Godwinson ties into the overarching concerns of the section of *Englaland*, 'The Harrowing of the North', from which 'Nothing' is taken.²⁸ What we have is a symbol of the end of Anglo-Saxon rule, the institution of French as the language of England and a

²⁸ The background of this is outlined in the preceding Chapter Two.

concerted oppression of the northern peoples of England. In 'Nithing', Ely's concerns with the historical adoption and enforcement of language, plus opposition to such measures, are played out through the figures of Margaret Thatcher and Arthur Scargill. According to Ely's explanatory notes on the poem in *Digging the Seam: Popular Cultures of the 1984/5 Miners' Strike*, 'Nithing' is an 'Old English word denoting a man so contemptible, that any honourable man had an obligation to slay him on sight' (Ely 2012, 130). What follows is a failed assassination attempt on Margaret Thatcher and three on Scargill.²⁹ After our introduction to the 'Theatre of Hate', Thatcher's next 'appearance' in the poem comes in the form of a chant, interspersed with somewhat graphic, mostly fish based, body-horror:

Maggie Maggie Maggie
The nithing must be scolded
To force it to reveal

Ut Ut Ut
it seems to be a woman
and yet
An eelpout coils
in the slimey gusset
Every woman's got one
birther of werewolves
catfish and zander
Maggie is one
hermaphrodite self-fucker
The lubricated head
of the butterfish
Wriggling through the sphincter
Maggie Maggie Maggie

Ut Ut Ut

(Ely 2015, 124)

It is impossible to avoid the insinuations about sex in this section. In a review of Hugo Young's *The Iron Lady* (1989), Martin Amis bombastically states that 'the only interesting thing about Mrs Thatcher is that she isn't a man' and that 'onlookers seems to share the same anxiety: that one day Mrs T. will start

²⁹ The Thatcher attempt relates to the Brighton hotel bombing on the 12th October 1984, during the Conservative Party Conference. Although there are no 'official' reports relating to the Scargill attempts—Ely's notes say that Scargill chose not to report the attempts 'in order to maintain the morale of the strikers' (2012, 130)—Scargill himself said in a 2005 interview for the Irish Republican paper, *An Phoblacht*—Gaelic for 'The Republic'—that there were five assassination attempts on him during the strike, and shortly after, which the media did not report (Scargill 2005).

heading for the wrong toilet' (2002, 19).³⁰ Amis' misogynistic statement ties into some of the apparent 'fears' emanating from Ely's misogynist narrator, namely that of Thatcher being a woman, but not enough of a woman. The reference to a 'hermaphrodite' is telling. Hermaphroditism in literature is, as argues Sarah Carter, 'paradoxically a symbol of union and conflict, of perfection and monstrosity, of proto-feminism and homoeroticism' (2010, 107). In line with Carter's comment, with the focus on Thatcher's body and sexual reproduction, there is a level not only of fear but also of intrigue. This intrigue becomes a form of aggression. With Thatcher being 'accused' of adopting the traits of traditional masculinity in the poem—traits undoubtedly required to become the first female Prime Minister in British history—there is an attempt to use these traits to undermine her 'womanliness'. Although not initially apparent, this too becomes an issue of naming. Thatcher is not referred to as 'she', but 'it' and it is as an 'it' that Thatcher 'appears to be a woman'. The fear stems not from being a 'woman', but from Thatcher looking like a woman is 'supposed' to and yet not behaving as one is expected. There is a difficulty of reconciling the image of Thatcher with her actions.

On first reading, the 'eelpout' referenced is a phallus. Yet, it is not an eel's pout, but an 'eelpout', a different type of fish altogether. While the root word is the same, an 'eelpout' is named for the shape of its mouth, and has very little physically in common with an eel, it is only in language where these things would be confused. We have been 'misinformed', or perhaps more accurately, we have accepted the (linguistic) appearance without questioning that which has been presented to us. This 'deceptive' presentation can be seen continuing through the inclusion of the 'catfish', 'zander' and 'butterfish'. Zander is a fish that is often mistaken for a pike, yet has no link to that species. The 'butterfish', also known as escolar, has often been referred to and incorrectly labelled as 'white tuna' (Warner 2013).³¹ The zander and catfish are also non-native species to the UK, and the zander in particular is part of the 'dirty dozen', twelve fish or flora that threaten UK waterways ('"Dirty Dozen" Threaten Waterways' 2008). This 'invasion' of non-native fish could also be seen as Ely targeting the EU's Common Fishery Policies which, especially in Scotland, proved to be unpopular amongst the majority of those who made their living from fishing.³² But why does Thatcher give birth to 'werewolves / catfish and zander'? This is fear, not just of

³⁰ Margaret Thatcher would still have been Prime Minister when Amis published his review in *Elle* magazine in October 1989.

³¹ In a report, 84% of the white tuna samples studied in the USA were found to be butterfish/escolar (Warner et al. 2013).

³² In his Ministerial Foreword to 2009's *The Scottish Government's Response to the European Commission's Green Paper on Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy*, Richard Lochhead—at the time Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment—wrote that the CFP (Common Fisheries Policy) 'is the EU's most discredited and unpopular policy' and that 'the CFP has often appeared a distant, centralised, unresponsive and discredited policy in which landlocked countries can have a greater say than a country like Scotland with a substantial fishing fleet'

Thatcher, but of the proliferation of Thatcher's ideas and the politics of misinformation, oppression and violence that these animals represent. In regards to 'werewolves', not only are they neither human nor wolf—'werewolves' themselves also being a symbol of hermaphroditism in some literature (Carter 2010, 93)—they are in thrall to the moon, a not too subtle link between a woman's menstrual cycle and notions of savagery.

Considering these issues of misinformation and naming alongside the chant that runs through the quoted section of the poem, Ely is critiquing a wider structure of misinformation that exists in our labour and political narratives. Not only does the chant refer to Thatcher by the overly informal 'Maggie', which serves as an attempt to 'dethrone' Thatcher from her position as PM and enforce upon her an overly familiar nickname, but it imagines a community of people speaking through a single voice. As the 'chant' bookends the above-quoted section of the poem, what we witness is the chant, ostensibly calling on Margaret Thatcher to leave office, holding within its rhetoric a more troubling multitude of submerged and repressed fears surrounding misinformation and gender. The chant allows voices to hide behind and within this supposedly singular call. The chant both drowns out voices and allows them to flourish with some impunity. As fragments of the chant are interspersed with the animal imagery detailed earlier, the chant becomes that which both perpetuates the narrative and that which tries to refocus it. Each cry of the chant can be read as justifying that which has gone before it, each grotesque representation being met with an affirmation by the chant or as a spur to continue. Simultaneously, the chant attempts to turn the reader and the text away from itself to deliver the narrative from the polemic of Thatcher as 'creature' and back to that of political figure. It is as a political figure that Thatcher has to be challenged. By configuring her as 'monster', even metaphorically, we remove Thatcher's culpability and construct her solely as a product of her nature, not of her actions. Ely is demonstrating the way in which narratives can be hijacked and repurposed so that what we 'intend' or what we believe our utterances mean is not always ours to choose. By the end of the quoted section of the poem, it is impossible to claim that '*Maggie Maggie Maggie / Ut Ut Ut*' denotes that which it did at the beginning of the section. By these final two lines, our reading of the chant has picked up and become coloured by that which it has been exposed to. Although a chant is necessarily predicated on a group shouting or singing in unison, it would be amiss to treat any group as having a fully homogeneous politics regardless of the outward expression of uniformity. Our rhetoric can be used to obscure our desires and drives, and our personal narratives can very rarely express or account for the narratives of others. Similarly, our narratives become part of

(Marine Scotland 2009, 1).

others' narratives, over which we have no control. Yet, these narratives by combining and growing larger and more vociferous become *the* narrative, a narrative that is both an approximation of all the narrative voices and one in which the individual cannot be heard.

In these poems, the shift in naming points to the way individuals become subsumed by larger political agendas. The legacies of Scargill and Thatcher are used as a way to advance particular labour narratives and to discredit others. Yet, these narratives are managed through 'reinterpretation, dilution, projection' and 'discriminating inclusion and exclusion' (Williams 1977, 123). The way the names of Scargill and Thatcher come to be manipulated and presented expose our labour narratives as a construction. These constructions seek to silence alternative voices and control the way labour narratives are received and understood. By controlling labour narratives, there is also an attempt to control the responses to our labour histories and labour presents.

Chapter Four: Trade Unions and the North

Mr. Patnick : My right hon. Friend drew attention during a recent visit to the north-east to the region's confidence. Does she agree that that confidence has shown an upswing in the whole of the area, and does it not demonstrate the hollowness of the so-called north-south divide?

The Prime Minister : I totally agree with my hon. Friend. In a visit to both the north-east and north-west last week one found that business is flourishing, business men are optimistic, unemployment is falling and the amount of reconstruction under the urban development corporation, particularly on the river front, is going excellently. I agree that the north-south divide has gone.

- *Hansard* (14 March 1989)

This chapter will examine conceptions of the North-South divide to highlight the already contested nature of what the North is and the dysfunctional legacies that this gives rise to, before examining how



Figure 3. Still of the new and old 'boundaries' of the North-South divide from the BBC4 documentary *The North-South Divide* (2009).

these conceptions inform the narratives of place that are found in the poems of Paul Bentley, Helen Mort and Steve Ely.

Although Margaret Thatcher informs us that the North-South divide is no longer of concern, and Irvine Patnick—Tory MP for Sheffield Hallam from 1987 to 1997 and later Sir Irvine Patnick, but no friend of the North¹—extrapolates a 'confidence' into an annulment of the North-South

¹ Patnick was MP for Sheffield Hallam during the 1989 Hillsborough disaster in which 96 Liverpool FC fans were crushed to death in the stands of Hillsborough Stadium, Sheffield, during a match between Liverpool FC and Nottingham Forest FC. After the tragedy, Patnick was one of the main sources for the infamous and patently offensive 'The Truth' front page headline of *The Sun* newspaper on the 16th April 1989 (Cameron 2012). The story claimed that Liverpool fans had stolen from victims' bodies, urinated on police officers and attacked relief workers (Gibson 2004). As a result of his role in perpetuating this untruth, there was a call, after the Hillsborough report was published in 2012, by the Labour MP John Mann to have Patnick stripped of his Knighthood. This never came to pass ('Sir Irvine Patnick Should Lose Knighthood, Says MP').

divide, the two Conservative politicians' exchange did not bear weight then, and nor does it today.² Having said this, where and why do we draw lines for a North-South divide at all? And what does it mean to construct places and narratives in a post-industrial North? In the work of Bentley, Mort and Ely, the conceptions of these northern places and strike narratives, particularly in regards to the North East, highlight the ways in which the stories told about these places are a patchwork of conflicting voices and acts of cultural appropriation. Through this appropriation, these narratives come to exclude those people they are supposed to represent.

I. The North-South Divide

Figure 3. shows a still taken from the television documentary *The North-South Divide*. The line towards the bottom of the image shows the 'traditional' North-South boundary, whereas the more northerly line is Professor Danny Dorling's updated boundary, a boundary which Dorling claims came into being essentially as a London-centric measure: a reflection of the greatest distance commuters are willing to travel to work in London. Dorling's approach is one based on economics and employment, with London as its focus. However, to find a consensus as to where the North begins, even before we begin to conceive of what it is, is near impossible.

The idea of London as the 'locus' aligns with Dave Russell's claim that the national culture 'has always been largely constructed from within London and its immediate environs and that the "North" therefore has been defined in that culture as "other" and ultimately, as inferior' (2004, 8). The implication from Russell is that our narratives of the North are constructed from 'outside'. The North is subject to narratives that come from the capital. The term 'environs' seems to stand in for the 'home counties', a term which places Surrey, Kent, Essex, Middlesex and other London-adjacent counties as effectively a form of economic and social subsidiary to the capital. The derivation of the phrase is unclear: does it situate these counties as the source of London's labour and food or does it refer to the location of the houses of members of parliament and the wealthy? Similarly, this North-South line is an imagined boundary, for which there seems to be no agreement as to its place or where it runs. Helen M. Jewell points out that ordnance survey maps take 'Hull-Preston as the dividing line', yet she prefers 'Humber to Mersey, with attention to the Trent between them', as it has been 'generally accepted as the beginning of

² On 28th February 2017, *The Guardian* published an article outlining how the Government's inheritance tax cut will overwhelmingly favour those in the South of England and 'exacerbate' the North-South divide (Asthana 2017).

the north of England [...] for more than a millennium' (1994, 25). However, even conceiving of the North as something above a line, particularly a line dictated from the 'South', continues Russell's concerns regarding this othering of the North. Frank Musgrove declares his North to be comprised of the counties of 'Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland and Westmorland, and Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire', with the caveat that Cheshire is 'something of a problem'; although we are not told why (1990, 7). By comparison, Katie Wales highlights that 'for Londoners and the metropolitan-oriented media, popular ironic phrases like "North of Potters Bar" or "North of Watford" [...] suggest that these are cultural faultlines, the bounds of civilisation' (2006, 10). By considering the North as uncivilised, the concerns of the people in the North are deemed not socially relevant. *The Guardian's* North of England editor Helen Pidd takes the (only slightly) tongue-in-cheek approach that the North stops 'when people have dinner instead of tea and lunch instead of dinner' (2015). The North is a language issue. The North comes into being at the point where our words no longer speak to the same things. Yet, more concerning is that Pidd's article is written in response to the admission from the then minister for the Northern Powerhouse, Conservative MP James Wharton, that 'the exact extent of the north in the context of the Northern Powerhouse is not prescribed by the government' (Pidd 2015).³ If the government cannot prescribe what the North is, then perhaps to see the 'Northern space' as being purely physical and geographical, which Wales and Pidd clearly do not, is insufficient in understanding what it means to construct the narratives of such a place.

If we think of space as fulfilling or performing a cultural function, there are those who conceive of the North in purely socio-cultural terms, whether by perpetuating or challenging the stereotypes of 'working-class vigour and capitalist rectitude' that 'weigh down' the North and discussions surrounding it (Spracklen 2016, 7).⁴ Radio DJ Stuart Maconie's punningly titled *Pies and Prejudice* is one example of an attempt to define the North culturally: it paints a North of 'lake Poets and Lindisfarne Island and at the

³ The role is currently held by Jake Berry MP under the new title Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth.

⁴ In the article from which this quotation is taken, Spracklen talks about how 'pit villages, mill towns and industrial cities stuffed with terraced housing became the sites for a construction of a new kind of northernness, a combination of working-class vigour and capitalist rectitude' (2016, 7). He then moves on to talk about the 'new men' who founded companies in the North and 'were parodied by the southern and landed elites for their ill manners, their oil-stained fingers and their lack of standing' (2016, 8). Elizabeth Gaskell's northern mill owners, John Thornton from *North and South* and John Carson from *Mary Barton*, can be seen as embodying Spracklen's idea of 'capitalist rectitude', particularly through their handling of the trade union movement in the novels. The only other source I can find in which the phrase 'capitalist rectitude' is found is Simon Schama's *Scribble, Scribble, Scribble: Writing on Ice Cream, Obama, Churchill and My Mother* in which Schama says the 'oligarchy' of 'United States Inc.' makes 'the age of the robber barons in the late nineteenth century seem a model of capitalist rectitude' (2011, 63). Here, however, he is using the lack of rectitude of northern capitalists as a comparative measure for the corruption of US oligarchs.

same time sink estates, ASBOs and the AIDS capital of Britain' (2008, xii).⁵ The 'lake poets and Lindisfarne Island' that Maconie invokes places the North as a site of non-metropolitan literary culture and an important locus for the Christianisation of Britain.⁶ Yet, Maconie's past is one which we have no 'access' to, everyone has passed away. This is an idea of the North caught between an idealisation of a cultural past and a troubled social present. Ely captures this tension in 'Wasta' when he talks of residents of a former mining village 'talking of happier days' while 'futureless / losers booze 10am Special Brew' (2015, 146). Ely dramatises the disconnect between the idealisation of a lived past and the present.

Social historian Stuart Rawnsley conflates these 'disputes' regarding the 'where' of the North, along with 'what' constitutes the North, to go as far as to suggest that 'the fact that the geographical location of the North is so ill-defined is an important reason why the sense of place has been condensed and distilled with such intensity' (2000, 3). I am not convinced of the logic of Rawnsley's statement, since to distill requires the extraction of an 'essential' something or a purification of a thing which can surely only exist through, in Rawnsley's terms, an act of defining what those things are in the first instance. Rawnsley's 'ill-defined' points towards an attempt to locate the North, but an attempt ultimately inadequate or flawed, an attempt either too vague or without sufficient focus on its limits. Rawnsley's quotation is about the limits, in both senses of the word, of the North. The quotations above talk either about where the North ends or where it begins; it is only Musgrove who writes of where the North *is*. Even Rawnsley's 'sense of place', with its talk of 'condensing' and 'distilling', suggests that there is some form of essential North, or at least the belief in an 'essential' North, and that the essence of the North can be concentrated or extracted in some respect. Rawnsley's language of heating and cooling liquids, and their movement from gas to liquid and back again, paints a North that we can attempt to contain, yet it also

⁵ In an article on theorising northernness, Karl Spracklen calls Maconie a 'professional northerner', along with George Formby, Michael Parkinson and Sarah Lancashire. Spracklen deems 'professional northerners' as those actors and other celebrities who 'have found a niche in popular culture through fetishising and celebrating a form of northern culture that is comforting to the audiences and readers, who want everyone to know their place and behave as expected.' (2016, 10). In poetry, I would suggest that writers such as Tony Harrison, Ian McMillan and Simon Armitage, for whom the North is often so 'visible' in their work, occupy this 'niche', but without many of the negative connotations that Spracklen seems to equate with it. Similarly, it seems surprising, considering Maconie's background as a music journalist and DJ, that he neglects to mention bands such as Sheffield's Cabaret Voltaire, Leeds' Gang of Four, Manchester's Joy Division and the record label Factory Records. In terms of Manchester specifically, Katie Milestone's article on cultural representation of post-war Manchester, 'Urban Myths: Popular Culture, The City And Identity', argues that the value of music scenes and the spaces that grow around them goes 'far beyond the economic—they have an intense symbolic impact on the identity of a city' (2008, 1173). For more people writing about their North see: Graham Turner, *The North Country* (1967); Simon Armitage, *All Points North* (1998); Martin Wainwright, *True North* (2012); Paul Morley, *The North* (2013).

⁶ The Lindisfarne Gospels, written by the monk Eadfrith in around AD715, contains the 'oldest surviving [Old] English version of the Gospels' known to be in existence (Di Consiglio 2013).

suggests one that is unstable or prone to manipulation by outside actors. This manipulation is the point from which this chapter takes its lead. As Dave Russell states in his book on the North in post-war popular culture, *Looking North*,

most people outside the North and many within it have come to know the region not through personal experience but via the version they encounter in the field of culture. To explore the constructed 'North' then, is to engage not with some peripheral academic plaything but with a major factor in the definition of popular mentalities.

(2004, 5)⁷

The North that Russell invokes is one which has at its heart questions surrounding inclusion and exclusion—those 'within' and 'outside' boundaries—and what it means to create and be created by cultural representations of a place we choose or are forced to identify with. Russell's claim that 'many within' the North have come to know the region through 'the field of culture' suggests that people in the North are themselves subject to cultural constructions of the North in the creation of their own sense of identity. With the difficulty demonstrated in affixing either a geographical or a cultural North, what we approach is the North as a space which occupies a position that is constantly transitional. The North inhabits a site (or sites) at various points above a range of conceptualised boundaries. We are left only with questions regarding how it is we construct our North and what these constructions mean in regards to a larger cultural politics of power. The problem that arises from these questions, these transitional places, is that they become vulnerable to appropriation. If it is not possible to fix the North in space (and time), there is then a danger that the places that make up the North will be described for and to us, by those holding 'power'.

*

⁷ Bar a couple of references to Tony Harrison, Russell's book generally shies away from poetry, his argument being that had poetry been included in his book it 'would have modified some of the comments on the marginal nature of the North's cultural contribution and status' (2005, 11). This points the reader to an endnote where Russell lists 'leading northern-born poets' as including: 'W.H. Auden, Basil Bunting, Tony Harrison, Ted Hughes, Roger McGough and Norman Nicholson' (2005, 13). It does seem rather odd that Russell intentionally dismisses these writers in the pursuit of an argument about the North's 'marginal nature', which he is well aware is compromised by poetry from the North.

II. Northern Spaces and Legacies

What I now want to do, through this contextualisation of the North, is present a 'place' or perhaps an idea of a 'north(ern) space' that could be seen as 'dysfunctional' and how this can be used to consider the construction of legacies in the poems that follow. In using the term 'dysfunctional', I am combining the twin semantic ideas of something which impairs or disrupts proper 'function' and that which makes conducting productive social relations problematic. In their 1983 essay, 'Place-Identity Physical World Socialization of the Self', Harold Proshansky, Abbe Fabian and Robert Kaminoff argue that

[p]hysical settings usually have a primary purpose. And it is this purpose that determines their design and sensory characteristics, the objects and facilities they require, and the kinds of individuals and related activities that will be found in them.

(2014, 79)

Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff's work helps to articulate the tension between what I am referring to as the 'statal' function of a place, that being how the state sees a place as operating and the built environment that is constructed to realise this usage, and the actual lived experience of a place, the way those who work and live there interact in and with said place. The way in which Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff use this idea of 'purpose' is multi-faceted and potentially contradictory. The use of the phrase 'physical setting' seems to align human action along with 'natural' space, but perhaps with more weight given over to the human action conducted there. This is somewhat at odds with Carl Sauer in his work on cultural and natural landscape, 'The Morphology of Landscape', where Sauer argues that while the 'physical area is fundamental [...] because it furnishes the materials out of which man builds his culture [...] the cultural landscape is fashioned out of a natural landscape by a culture group.' And, consequently, that 'by his cultures he makes use of the natural forms, in many cases alters them, in some destroys them' (1977, 308-9). 'Place', and how we understand and construct our own places, is a product of the interaction between physical geography and (intentional and unintentional) cultural activity.⁸ What the 'physical' does in the Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff quotation is reinforce the idea that this act of 'setting' relates to the tangible—be it humanly constructed or not. A 'setting' suggests something being positioned, and of a choice having been made regarding the where and why of its placing. If a 'physical setting' has a 'purpose', the implication is that this 'purpose' grows out of the 'setting' itself or is intrinsic to the 'setting'. The 'purpose' of the place is as a result of the particularities of the 'physical setting'.

⁸ In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), Michel de Certeau defines his notion of 'place' as a 'distinct location, a location it defines' which includes an 'instantaneous configuration of positions' which at its very least 'implies an indication of stability' (117).

However, the inverse would also be true in that the 'purpose' of something also speaks to the reason for that thing's creation or (continued) existence. The 'setting' is itself a creation brought about by the 'primary purpose'. It is the 'setting' which determines the 'purpose' and the 'purpose' which necessitates the 'setting'. Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff do go on to assert that it is this 'purpose', whatever that may be, which 'determines' the 'characteristics, the objects', the 'individuals' and the 'activities' of a 'physical setting'. A place is not simply created to fulfil a particular purpose, but is often created for a particular (type of) person, in which they are supposed to perform a particular role or 'action'.⁹ However, we could complicate this idea of 'setting' and 'purpose' if we think, as Sauer does, of 'culture' as the 'agent', the 'natural area' as the 'medium', and the 'cultural landscape' as the 'result' when constructing place (1977, 310). Sauer suggests that the 'primary purpose' of a place can not be realised fully until after culture has begun to shape the natural area—although the natural area invariably also 'shapes' how culture can, and attempts to, 'make use' of an area: 'By his cultures he makes use of the natural forms, in many cases alters them, in some destroys them' (Sauer 1977, 309). It is the 'cultural landscape' which is the result of these alterations, these destructions. Our 'cultural landscape', and how we consider our places and our relationships with those places, is itself a product of the ways in which we have manipulated the places (and the narratives of those places) we have chosen to inhabit. However, as Doreen Massey argues in her essay 'Places and their Pasts', 'if the past transforms the present, helps thereby to make it, so too does the present make the past' (1995, 187). Therefore, our ideas about our pasts shape how we think about our present relationship with a place, but, simultaneously, our thinking about our present is directly responsible for the stories that are told regarding our place's past and histories. As Massey also says, histories of our past 'are constructed so as to confirm the views and convictions of the present' (1995, 186). Histories are told from the present. To tell stories and histories of a place is to select the stories that confirm our current relationship with a place as being correct or valid (if this relationship is 'functional'), or to tell stories that highlight and question a present and 'dysfunctional' relationship with a place.

⁹ There is, however, something slightly uncomfortable underlying Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff's carelessly worded, statement. In the statement, the suggestion that 'kinds of individuals and related activities' are to be 'found' in a physical setting comes at the end of a list in which the physical necessities, characteristics and requirements of the purpose are considered before those people who will inhabit that place. Therefore, it follows that judgements are made in advance as to how the individuals 'who will be found' in a particular place should be living and what an outside actor has deemed to be their requirements. While this may simply be an 'inattentive' usage, even the phrase 'found' that Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff employ suggests that were these individuals not 'found' in *their* physical space, they would be 'lost' somewhere else. There is a slightly more inclusive reading as 'found' does also allow a certain ambiguity, bringing to mind the idea of something having been discovered inadvertently, alongside notions of something being established or establishing. The 'individuals' are both part of the founding of a place as much as they are at the mercy of what has been founded there.

Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff go on to explain what occurs when a physical setting's 'primary purpose' is removed or compromised in some way. This is the idea I referred to earlier of a 'dysfunctional' setting:

It is, generally speaking, only when a physical setting becomes dysfunctional that a person becomes aware of his or her expectations for that setting. What was routine and in the background suddenly becomes the 'figure' in the thinking of those using the setting.

(2014, 81)

This 'dysfunction' comes about when the reason that individuals inhabit (or began to inhabit) an area is invalidated. An obvious example would be the 'pit village'. Most of these villages were constructed around the time of the industrial revolution to house miners employed in the newly established pits of England and Wales.¹⁰ With the closure of all deep-pits in the United Kingdom, the 'primary purpose' of these villages has ceased to exist. Robert Chesshyre, in an article for *The Independent* about the Easington Colliery and the pit village that surrounds it, points out that 'pit villages only existed because they sat on coal' and that by removing the pit 'you remove the heart of the community' (Chesshyre 2013). If we were to frame Chesshyre's assertion in slightly more critical terms, by closing the pit—or removing a setting's 'primary purpose'—an individual's relationship with, and how they define themselves in relation to, a place is forced into a situation in which the nature of their relationship must be re-examined, as the terms on which the relationship was built no longer 'exist', and, therefore, such a relationship is unable to function productively. How we see ourselves and the narratives that we tell regarding a place become vulnerable to appropriation by those who seek to exploit said place and its narratives. Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff continue by saying that

[p]lace-identity cognitions express and reflect the physical setting and their properties that support and are directly relevant to the social roles and attributes that define who the person is, how he or she is to behave, and what he or she is worth.

(2014, 81)

Therefore, returning to the earlier quotation from Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, as one's 'expectations' of a 'place-identity' are called into question, the terms used to speak about a setting and

¹⁰ This also includes towns such as Grimethorpe, now as well known for its colliery band and the film *Brassed Off* (1996) as it was as a mining town—the town is referred to as 'Grimley' in the film. The Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas edited *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike 1984-5* brings together an exemplary collection of oral histories and documentation relating to the state of a number of pit villages in the 1980s and the effect that the strike had on how people came to see the spaces in which they lived.

ourselves become in need of reconfiguration. As Massey asserts, ‘the identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how these histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant’ (1995, 187). As Massey’s statement suggests, our histories are pluralised, they are multi-vocal. Yet, they are caught up in battles for dominance.

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II.I Paul Bentley’s ‘The Two Magicians’

At this point, I am going to return to Paul Bentley’s ‘The Two Magicians’. In the poem, Bentley attempts to mediate between collective and singular voices to expose how geographical legacies come to be constructed and appropriated. A curious element of the poem is the ‘Solo’ and ‘Chorus’ that Bentley employs, almost as a poetic footnote to the ‘main’ text. To give an example of what I am referring to, in the ‘King Arthur’ section that I quoted in the previous chapter, Bentley’s text and ‘Chorus’ appear as follows:

Johnny Marr’s guitar screaming, echoing -
Mum’s *Turn that down I can’t hear myself think!*
Two boys on top of the pile, picking coal.
Me thoughts I heard one calling: Child

Chorus:

There was a women’s picket arranged for Cresswell... The police were mesmerised at first. We got up to the pit gates, then all these vans came flying up. They tried to keep us in one spot, so we started walking up and down. One of the inspectors was getting a bit uppity, ‘You stay there, you say nothing’. But this time we did say something.

(2011, 12)

All of the instances of the Chorus in the poem—of which there are six—and the Solo—of which there is only one—are taken verbatim from the 1986 book *Thurcroft: A Village and the Miners’ Strike*.¹¹ The

¹¹ The *Thurcroft* book was also included as one of the ‘sources and acknowledgements’ in David Peace’s *GB84*. Peace’s book is a largely ‘factual’ account of the 1984 strike, which he presents as playing out through the political machinations of Terry Winters, chief executive of the NUM (based on the NUM’s then chief executive, Roger Windsor) and Steve Sweet. Sweet is based on Thatcher’s adviser, David Hart, who is also the subject for Ely’s ‘The Ballad of David Hart’ and is namechecked by Ely in ‘Ballad of the Scabs’. According to the obituary of Hart in *The Guardian*, during the miners’ strike 1984-5 Hart, rather euphemistically, ‘made himself useful’ to Thatcher and ‘went to work’ on the less pro-Scargill NUM members of Nottingham, one of whom later ‘became [Hart’s] butler’. Hart’s father was the founder of the Henry Ansbacher merchant bank. It is thought Hart made his first million pounds in the late 1960s, was bankrupt by the mid-1970s and was back working in the property sector in the 1980s, after his brother had paid off his debts and Hart had inherited a large sum of money from his father (Childs 2011). During 1984-5 miners’ strike, Hart had close links with the MI5 and Stella Rimington—who in 1992 would go

book's cover calls *Thurcroft* 'an oral history by the people of Thurcroft' (Gibbon & Steyne 1986). What exactly is meant by 'oral history' is outlined in the editors' preface, which provides an account of the process by which the book was assembled and came to be:

We interviewed over fifty people, and finished up with over ninety hours of tape. So that the Thurcrofters could retain control of the project, these tapes were transcribed and passed back to those interviewed for editing. The revised versions were then indexed by topic and issue, and assembled into a coherent story.

(Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 7)

What is clear from Gibbon and Steyne's preface is that the book's claim to being 'oral history' comes with something of a caveat: those who were interviewed were able to edit the transcriptions of their interviews.¹² This returning of the transcriptions to the Thurcrofters represents an ethical concern, allowing the people to speak for themselves and control how they are represented. The reason I draw attention to this is simply to highlight the forms by which texts are reconfigured. The 'oral' aspect of the

on to be Director General of the MI5 (Milne 2014, 331). After the strike ended, Seamus Milne claims that Hart 'actively nurtured links with the intelligence world, which were extensive on both sides of the Atlantic' (2014, 331). Milne continues that:

Hart was a friend of the late CIA director William Casey and was fêted in Reaganite Washington. Fred Ickle, who had been number two at the Pentagon, was a senior guest at Hart's country mansion. Herb Meyer, a former senior CIA officer, helped to edit a hard-line Cold War monthly bulletin, *World Briefing*, for Hart in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Hart also paid for a visit to Britain in 1988 by Adolfo Calero, the Nicaraguan Contra leader, and ran a samizdat agency for Russian and East European dissidents in the dying days of the Soviet Union.

(2014, 331)

The town of Thurcroft itself is located in South Yorkshire, and largely served the Thurcroft Colliery until the pit's closure in 1991.

¹² Dr Michelle Winslow of the Oral History Society, in response to an email I sent to the Society, said that

[i]t is the practice of some oral historians to return transcripts to interviewees for editing. However there are issues and personally I don't do this unless specifically asked.

Transcripts are a secondary document, they're not the original recording and the process of transcription by a 3rd party may alter meaning. Hence I give audio copies to interviewees and if they have any issues with their recording this can be discussed and noted on their consent form. Very occasionally someone might request edits.

In giving interviewees audio recordings, they have a copy of what happened on the day and a keepsake for family if they wish. When I've shown interviewees their transcripts in the past they've often been returned with heavy edits because people might not like the verbatim style and make corrections to words and grammar.

(Winslow 2017)

reminiscences, once transcribed, become a text (or series of texts) which can be 'assembled' and given the appearance of 'coherence'. The 'oral' becomes our entrance to a history, our way of gaining access to the stories that people tell, but that 'oral history' reaches us in an edited form. The 'oral' forces us to face our histories and positions us 'in front' of the people from whom these histories emerge. In *Thurcroft*, the 'oral' is the raw material, used to tell a story that is both 'truthful and positive'. It is also a story which explicitly omits 'purely abusive statements', apart from when they helpfully 'contribute to the depiction of a mood' (Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 7). What *Thurcroft* attempts to do is 'depict' the (positive) mood, of a particular place, during the miners' strike 1984-5. The 'issue' that arises is that this oral contribution has itself been edited. Setting out with an agenda to produce a work that is both 'truthful and positive', regarding one of the most economically ruinous events in post-war Britain for those caught up in it, is also an attempt to establish a particular type of reading regarding the dispute.¹³ With the book published so soon after the strike had ended, there is an attempt on the part of those affected to form their own narrative, before it can be coopted or dismissed.

In *Thurcroft*, for each quotation we are provided with a name, or more commonly a letter, from which a brief biographical description can be found in the index at the book's rear. For the section from 'The Two Magicians' quoted above, which Bentley has taken to be part of his 'Chorus', *Thurcroft* tells us that it is 'G' who contributed the reminiscence. We are told that 'G' is 'female': 'late 40s Widow. Native and resident of Thurcroft area. Mining family background. (Sister of AA). Pit canteen worker. WAG activist' (Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 271).¹⁴ 'G' is 'cited' roughly forty times across the book. The fact that these biographical details are supplied to us at all, particularly in light of the anonymisation of proper names, is surprising. The implication is that, in a book in which most names are anonymised, we are still encouraged to reflect upon the individuality of the 'speaker', or at least are given sufficient information to be able to ascertain where these utterances came from.¹⁵ This individuality is categorised through their gender, age, marital status, place of residence, family history, employment status and the 'role' played during the 1984-5 strike. However, we do have to seek out this information ourselves, and while readily available in the rear of the book, after each quotation in the main text we are only given the letter. Each quotation is presented as from a single 'author', an author whose 'identity' we must choose to uncover. Nevertheless, the text is submitted as 'their story of the strike' (Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 7). It

¹³ The most economically ruinous, perhaps, until the true fall out from the UK's decision to leave the European Union is realised.

¹⁴ 'AA' is another person interviewed for the book. 'WAG' stands for Women's Action Group.

¹⁵ The only names we are given are of those of branch officers who are 'describing or reflecting upon their public work as officers, and political activists past and present not employed by the NCB or resident in the village' (Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 7-8).

could be argued that it is not really 'their' story: it is the collective story of Thurcroft, or the attempt to tell and construct a story of 'a village and the miners' strike'. In the book, we have a number of voices—fifty-two not including Peter Gibbon and David Steyne who act as editors—telling us individual stories that are used to construct a grander (singular) tale about a pit village. There is an attempt to synthesise a form of cohesive strike narrative. Bentley is taking 'their story' for his own, contemporary, narrative. What Bentley's poem does that *Thurcroft* cannot is put their narrative into direct conversation with the legacy that has been established in the wake of the miners' strike.

The editors go so far as to say:

No claim is made for the typicality of Thurcroft as a 'British pit village'. The activities and experiences of Thurcrofters were shaped in part by the village's particular history and character. To the extent that this is true of all particular villages, there is no 'typical British pit village'.

(Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 8)

If there is no typical 'pit village', then there should be no typical strike narrative. The strike of 1984-5, 'though national in form, was regional in character' (Samuel 1986, 20). In Nottingham, for example, 'fewer than 2000 men finished the year on strike from a total workforce of nearly 32,000' (Paterson 2014, 11). Yet, even going into the strike, as Bob Fryer notes,

the great danger of divisions opening up within the NUM was evident from the outset: Nottinghamshire and the rest of the Midland coalfields were likely to be a problem and bitter memories of unsupported struggles in 1983 in South Wales and Scotland necessitated vigorous campaigns to secure widespread support for the strike.

(1985, 70)

While the miners were part of a national union, the major drive for many would have been, as much as anything else, the protection and continuation of their own jobs, at their own pit. Even if this were not the case, each pit's own danger of closure, its 'productivity' at the time and its geographical situation, would necessitate the level of support the striking miners might receive from locals and the NUM itself. Each 'region' experienced its own version of the 1984-5 miners' strike.¹⁶ The poems in this chapter

¹⁶ Lewis Minkin, in his book on the relationship between the Labour Party and trade unions, writes that 'the NUM was not a united union - much of the large Nottinghamshire Area refused to participate, neither did some other sectors. And it was not a united trade union movement which operated alongside it; some union leaderships [...] were politically alienated and heavily and publicly critical of the lack of a ballot and the picketing tactics involved' (1991, 136). Kim Howells notes the initial reluctance in Wales 'to take the lead once again in confronting a national government', as 'South Wales had led every major coal stoppage since the balmy days of the mid-1970s'. This reluctance to lead was down to a sense that 'they would find themselves isolated in splendid heroism - ready to be picked off one by one after returning to work with their tails between their legs' (1985, 140). Even at its most

navigate the particular legacies of strikes in the North East to show how the people these legacies are supposed to represent have been alienated from them. If the strike was formally national, but characteristically regional, what we encounter when talking about place in regards to the 1984-5 miners' strike is a tension between the desire to create grand narratives and establish uniform legacies and the aim, simultaneously, of doing justice to a place's 'particular history and character'.

Returning to 'The Two Magicians', we might ask what has happened now that the quotation by 'G' regarding the 'women's picket arranged for Cresswell' has been separated from the voices which previously surrounded it, the voice(s) of the village, and come to be reconfigured as 'Chorus'? In the instances where Bentley quotes from *Thurcroft* for the 'Chorus' and 'Solo', the attributions have been removed. However, after the first, and only, 'Solo' in the poem—'*Morning, wankers!*' (2011, 8)—Bentley does tell his reader that the 'Solo and Chorus speeches are from *Thurcroft: A Village and the Miners' Strike: An Oral History* by the People of Thurcroft' (2011, 8). We are aware that the quotations come from 'people', plural. Yet, by omitting even the brief lettered attribution and biographical information from the source material, these quotations act almost as a disembodied, generalised voice of a place and time. Bentley himself said in email correspondence with me that his

original idea was to represent directly quoted voices from the mining community as the chorus, and to play these off against the voice of the police, which would form the Solo. The idea was to represent the individual voices of the mining community as a community of voices, and the voice of the police as representing the aggressively individualist ethos of the Tory government - hence the 'Solo'.

(Bentley 2017)

The 'Solo', as mentioned before, is quite literally 'solo' in Bentley's poem, it appears only the once. Bentley's original idea to have the voice of the 'Solo' reappear through the poem in dialogue with the 'Chorus' is not carried out in the published text, there being only one police 'voice' in *Thurcroft*. By using the terms 'Chorus' and 'Solo', Bentley does distinguish between the idea that there are 'voices' from the mining community, but only 'the voice' of the police. While Bentley describes the police as representing 'an aggressively individualist ethos', ironically, this voice could itself be seen as forming part of a collective. The 'police' in the poem are a singular voice, but also the voice of a larger police force and the

domestic, Natalie Butts-Thompson and Deborah Price, in the oral history project *How Black Were Our Valleys*, make the passing reference that 'people would put you up in their houses for a week in North Wales and usually about two or three days at a time in the Midlands' (2014, 6). While both are altruistic acts, the difference does speak to an idea of the character of the strike having a decidedly regional edge.

voice of the state. Even then, the 'voice' is not that of a police officer, but of Pat Fortune, NUM Branch President, recounting what a police officer is supposed to have said to the miners:

We'd not said a word, but the words that met us on our own pit lane from somebody down south, who if they were on their own in our village would probably shit themselves, was '*Morning, wankers!*'.

(Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 113)

In this anecdote, it is not so much what the police officer said, but the way Fortune frames it in terms of place that is of most interest. Bentley has removed the questions that Fortune poses regarding place to leave the poem with the simple declarative, '*Morning, wankers!*'. Bentley says that he was intending to show the 'individualist ethos' of the Tory government, hence the term 'Solo', yet he does it through the shout of a 'policeman', told to us through the reminiscences of a striker, quoted from another text.

Bentley does not include what seems to be Fortune's main 'thrust': it is the fact of the police officer's being from 'down south', and not simply calling the strikers 'wankers' but doing so 'on our own pit lane', that seems to rankle. For Fortune, the issue is as much about place as it is about politics—or it is about the politics of place. The voice from 'down south' heard in the North is an occupying one. It is there to control the strikers and their access to their 'village'. Even in an attempt to tell their narrative of the strike, there is another voice present, one of the state. However, it is clear that the 'Solo' voice is out of place in the poem: it appears once, consists of only two words, and is then, as Bentley sees it, displaced by the Chorus (2017). In the footnote to the Solo, Bentley also tells us that the 'wankers' comment comes from a 'policeman greeting pickets', which is more information than we are given for any of the subsequent *Thurcroft* quotations that make up the 'Chorus'. In the prominence given to the mining voices against this single voice from the police, the voice of the 'village' comes to drive out the voice of the 'state'. However, Bentley omits any biographical details from any of the appearances of the 'Chorus'. In the retelling of the narrative, the 'who' of the voice has been expunged, it has become 'the' single voice, a contribution to an alternative narrative. The 'Chorus' exists both as the singular voice of a person and the collective voice of a people and place.

There is, however, an ethical concern that needs to be taken in to account when considering how Bentley uses these voices of the people of *Thurcroft* in the poem. As Susan Sontag puts it: 'no "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain' (2003, 6). Bentley is aware that pain does not disappear, but that it shifts and becomes something else. The passage of time between the miners' strike 1984-5 and Bentley's *Largo* means that the pain Bentley represents is a pain that no longer

exists in the same form as it once did. It is a pain engendered by a lack of representation and a loss of voice, rather than the hardships of the strike itself.

Yet, Sontag's primary concern is with the 'we'. Although Bentley's 'Chorus' exists as both singular and collective, the quotations taken from Thurcroft do privilege a 'we'. However, this 'we' comes from the people of the village itself—'*this time we did say something*' (Bentley 2011, 12). 'We' is the term by which the people of Thurcroft have chosen to represent themselves. John Berger says that 'poetry can repair no loss but it defies the space which separates. And it does this by its continual labor of reassembling what has been scattered' (2005, 95). Bentley's use of the voices of Thurcroft does not take their struggle for granted or fail to appreciate the villagers' individual labours during the strike; Bentley's appropriation is an attempt to 'defy the space' that has been established between the marginalised voices of the people of Thurcroft (and more broadly the working classes) and the 'official' strike narrative of 1984-5. In the book *The Poethical Wager*, Joan Retallack asserts that 'noticing becomes art when, as contextualizing project, it reconfigures the geometry of attention, drawing one into conversation with what would otherwise remain silent in the figure-ground patterns of history' (2003, 10). Bentley's poem draws the voices from *Thurcroft* into conversation with his poem, and his poem's conversation with contemporary labour issues and narratives. Poet Natasha Sajé claims that 'poems that deal with the lives of others need to show an awareness (which may be implicit as well as explicit) that another person is always a complicated story' (2009). Bentley's splicing together of various literary and cultural reference points in 'The Two Magicians', as well as the voices of the people of Thurcroft, show him to be a writer engaged with and 'performing' these complications in the poem. While the use of the villagers' words in the poem requires Bentley to navigate ethical questions regarding what it means to speak as and for someone else, 'these ethical questions become matters not of calculating a position within a range of absolutes but of wagering on values in order to remain in motion in the face of otherwise paralyzing doubts, if not fears' (Retallack 2003, 12). The voices from Thurcroft are not inserted into 'The Two Magicians' to simply provide 'authentic', working-class strike voices, but to help establish a labour narrative (and poem) that refuses to conceal the complications that arise in the construction of our labour histories.

In terms of the Chorus, Bentley constructs and uses its collective and singular voice to demonstrate the ways in which strike and union narratives come to be formed and manipulated. In music, a chorus is that which constitutes a return, a repetition and a (re)focussing on the song's main idea or concept. In 'The Two Magicians', while the source material, *Thurcroft*, is repeated, the content of each Chorus is not.

Unless, we see the repetition thematically, in terms of collective struggle—‘*But this time we did say something*’ (Bentley 2011, 12). In *Thurcroft*, the ‘voices’ change. In the poem, while the words change, the ‘voices’ stay the same. The Chorus is introduced and displayed in the same way throughout the poem which suggests a coherent voice. An even more fitting idea would be if we equate ‘chorus’ with its synonym of ‘choir’ or ‘ensemble’. What Bentley does, by appropriating the speech as a Chorus, is to frame the singular instance as a representation of the larger collective struggle during the strike. Although it was originally a single voice, Bentley affords each voice the authority to speak for and as a group, highlighting the cooperative effort that necessitates the continuation of any strike or political struggle. However, the individual gives way to and is swamped by a collective narrative of place and memory. In a ‘choir’, most choristers would be singing a similar thing, at the same time, in the same place. What separates this from a chant is that a chant is structured in such a way so that others can join in with relative ease; the constant repetition of a slogan or phrase allows others to contribute their voice to it.¹⁷ A choir does not allow this level of easy alignment. Choirs practise, and to take part you must already know what it is you will be singing or are expected to contribute. A choir is not spontaneous: everyone is required to be on the same page. This idea of place, time and idea aligning amounts to Bentley ‘allowing’ the village itself to speak and that those residents of the village speak with a single voice, where who said what becomes largely irrelevant. There is a clear understanding that this is a construction of unanimity. The ‘village’ is distilled in the book *Thurcroft* and then further concentrated in the poem. As ‘The Two Magicians’ was published in 2011, and the Thurcroft Colliery was closed in 1991, the poem is presenting memories of a place that no longer exists, at least in terms of its ‘primary purpose’ as a pit village. In one ‘Chorus’, a father rhetorically asks his daughter, “‘*Now you’re missing your picketing, aren’t you?*’” (Bentley 2011, 18). The sense becomes of a daughter not simply missing the act of picketing itself, but also of having anything to picket for. There is no mine and there are no jobs to protect or fight for. In *Thurcroft*, the contributors and editors are attempting to retell the story of the strike in a pit village. Where Bentley repurposes sections of *Thurcroft*, the Chorus becomes the retelling of people remembering a place that does not exist. The Chorus becomes almost an apparition, the italicised text reinforcing the idea that the edges of this story have been blurred, that we are ‘hearing’ it and looking at it as the representation of a place that may once have existed.

If we were to think of the Chorus in terms that we may traditionally associate with the ancient ‘Greek stage’—an idea that Bentley said he had in mind when constructing the Chorus—the Chorus becomes more than a simple act of representation. In our email correspondence, Bentley said that with the

¹⁷ For more discussion on the idea and potentiality for voices in a ‘chant’ see Chapter Three.

Chorus he 'had the Greek stage in mind, and (very loosely) in regards to Tony Harrison's use of the chorus in his dramatic works' (Bentley 2017). The link to Harrison comes about in relation to Harrison's 1981 translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Harrison's 1985 libretto, *Medea: A Sex-War Opera*. While Harrison's *Oresteia* employed an all-male cast for the production in keeping with Ancient Greek practice, Harrison's *Medea* separates the Chorus in two, a male and a female chorus. The male Chorus implores the 'State Official' to 'throw the switch / on MEDEA, the child-killing witch', while the female Chorus asks 'what male propaganda lurks / behind most operatic works / that music's masking?' (1986, 368 and 370). As Steve Padley notes, the Chorus of women

incisively scrutinises the link between patriarchal and cultural values, the eloquence of their discourse reversing traditional associations of the female with the private speech of the *oikos* against those of the male with the public rational debate of the *polis*. By contrast, the repetitive, rabble-raising chanting of the male chorus would probably, in production, have evoked the unsophisticated cacophony of a football crowd or other vociferous mob gathering, in spite of the 'high' cultural provenance of their words.

(Padley 2001)

While I do not see Bentley's Chorus as performing the same function as the one Steve Padley posits, we can read Bentley's Chorus, and 'The Two Magicians' as a whole, as challenging some of the notions of 'private speech' alongside 'public debate'. The private utterances of the people of Thurcroft are repositioned and employed to speak as a 'public' alongside Bentley's own, 'private', strike reminiscences. The private narratives are employed as public ones. *Thurcroft* repositions private utterances as public in a way that blurs the line between the two, while the poem then appropriates them for and as poetry. Yet, this appropriation as poetry can be seen as complicating the private and public, in that the poem exists both for a private reading or readership and as a public cultural product that can be purchased. To borrow terms from Greek theatre, the 'oikos' of the individual reminiscences in *Thurcroft* become the 'polis' in Bentley's work, while Bentley's own poetry acts as the 'oikos' itself. At the end of section IV of the poem, this 'blurring' is in evidence when Bentley writes:

The dogs closing in. The trap set.
Wham! - they can't see what's coming.

Chorus:

*They saw us and started chasing us back through the wood. We were running
Blind, falling over stumps and running into trees.*

(2011, 14)

The section not in italics is Bentley's, the italicised section has been lifted from *Thurcroft*. Bentley's 'dogs' cross over the demarcation provided by 'Chorus' and become part of the 'they' chasing the miners—the 'us' of the section. Bentley's 'private' strike reminiscences become part of the people of *Thurcroft*'s story. The lingering question is whether Bentley's words hijack those of the people of *Thurcroft* or simply repurpose them? I would argue that it is the latter of the two. Bentley's 'dogs' could be read as usurping the 'they' of the Chorus, removing them from the narrative. However, it is Bentley's 'dogs' that join the chase, along with the 'riot police with shields, batons and dogs' from *Thurcroft* (Gibbon & Steyne 1986, 89), combining the two narratives into a new rendering of this particular story of the strike. Bentley's words—'Wham!'—are reflected in the strikers—'*running into trees*'—even though Bentley is writing almost thirty years later. The 'past' comes to comment upon the 'present' and the 'present' creates the space for the 'past' to be reassessed and reevaluated.

In the book *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, the authors propose that 'ancient choruses are both actions themselves and representations of action, *praxis* and *mimesis*; that they resist any temporal frame: performing in the present, choruses look to the past and future'; and that to take part in a chorus is 'to be embedded in a social texture and to have a share in the pleasure of community' (Billings, Felix & Macintosh 2014, 2-3). The chorus comments on what is taking place (plus occasionally influencing it—in Sophocles' *Antigone* for example) and acts as a vehicle by which voice can be given to thoughts that characters cannot express themselves. Choruses typically performing in the 'present', yet looking to the 'past and future', means they influence how we interpret our pasts and how we construct our future narratives. Bentley's work has never been 'performed' with a chorus, nor was that the intention. The space in which the Chorus is performed is in the private act of reading, while the Chorus is itself performing in and for the poem. It is performing *in* the poem in that the quotations exist as 'visitors' from another piece of work, ostensibly about the same subject, but nevertheless 'tied' to both a physical object—the book, *Thurcroft*—and a physical space and specific time—*Thurcroft* as town after the miners' strike. The quotations are performing the role of 'visitors' or 'refugees' from a place, the town of *Thurcroft*, that no longer functions directly in relation to its (initial) primary function, after the closure of *Thurcroft* Colliery. The *Thurcroft* quotations are now serving the 'needs' of Bentley and the poem, so are performing *for* and as a part of the poem's whole. The interviews that the people of *Thurcroft* gave about *Thurcroft* and the miners' strike 1984-5 are no longer solely about *Thurcroft* and the miners' strike, but also about Bentley's poem and the strike's legacy. The people who gave the interviews no longer have control over them. The narratives of the people of *Thurcroft* are now part of the strike legacy, a strike

legacy that Bentley coopts for his own poem. They were not Bentley's words initially, but they in effect become his, and part of his contribution to the strike narrative.

The Chorus, when it appears, comes at the bottom of the page. It (effectively) mediates between the poem's past and future (as enacted by the movement from one page to the next). The Chorus comes after the poem 'proper' and as such it becomes almost the product of and, at the same time, a comment on the poem's 'content'. In the Chorus that ends section IV, the rabbits being chased by dogs in the poem 'magick into the miners chased by police through the wood in the Chorus' (Bentley 2017)—'The dogs closing in. The trap set. / Wham! - they can't see what's coming [...] *They saw us and started chasing us back through the wood. We were running blind, falling over stumps and running into trees*' (Bentley 2011, 14). Bentley's use of the phrase 'magick into' is one that prematurely shuts down what appears to happen between these two 'sections' of the poem. The 'rabbits' that are mentioned 'become' the strikers. Yet, it would seem that while the rabbits do 'become' the strikers, in the sense that the rabbits give way to the strikers as the Chorus begins, this neglects to consider that both still 'exist' on the page, simultaneously. While reading the poem, we are aware that the rabbits exist before we realise that they will 'become' or be 'reimagined' as miners, but we cannot ever read the striking miners of the Chorus without the rabbits. The rabbits are always present in the reading, even when they are not referenced. Our legacies are formed both by explicit reference points and 'stories', and those which have been sidelined or covered over. What this means is that the Chorus is necessarily indebted to the past, it is a (indirect) product of it in the poem. However, the Chorus also mediates and reconfigures our understanding of the past. It, thereby, creates a 'new' present and platform for the future. Visually, 'Chorus' acts almost as a valve or bridge between the two sections of the poem, a connection between separated voices, places and times. The Chorus allows voices to be heard, it establishes a place for them. Bentley himself said: 'I was very conscious of the magnitude of my subject, and felt that my own voice was not adequate to it - that this was a subject that demanded a chorus of voices' (Bentley 2017). It is as if the Chorus is the foundation on which the poem is built, or at least that which 'stabilises' it. The Chorus provides the voice of collective experience that gives the poem the validity and authentication Bentley believes it to require. However, the *Thurcroft* utterances are removed from the realm of the supposedly 'non-fictional' oral history to a work whose artifice is clearly evident – nowhere more so than in the reference to a (collective) Chorus. Yet, because we are perhaps encouraged to view the *Thurcroft* sections as 'true', we are in danger of missing the contrived nature of the construction of these legacies in the first instance, first as oral text, then as transcribed oral text, and finally, appropriated to become part of Bentley's poem.

Although there are voices from *Thurcroft* throughout 'The Two Magicians', the 'Chorus' itself is separated. This separation links back to the ideas of the 'dysfunctional space'. To return to Proshanksy, Fabian and Kaminoff's claim:

[It is] only when a physical setting becomes dysfunctional that a person becomes aware of his or her expectations for that setting. What was routine and in the background suddenly becomes the 'figure' in the thinking of those using the setting.

(1983, 81)

What we have is that which was in 'routine' in *Thurcroft*, the people, the place (the labour), against the dysfunction of a strike that had only recently ended.¹⁸ The individual voices are presented side by side in such a way as to suggest the book speaking as a village. The narrative is one of a village and its people that are created and sustained by one another. With the closure of the mine, the village itself and the people who inhabit the place that 'served' it become the "'figure" in the thinking'. As the expectations for the village and the people who live (or lived) there are usurped, so are their reminiscences. The people are now talking about a space that no longer exists. As a result, in Bentley's poem those people and the place they are talking about are no longer 'routine' or 'background', they are themselves part of the 'dysfunction'. It is through this dysfunction that, united by common tragedy, the inhabitants come to consider themselves 'villagers'. The quotations that make up the 'Chorus' are no longer about the miners' strike itself, they become about the legacy of those caught up in it and Bentley's desire to provide a place in which they are able to function.

Through the quotations that constitute the various appearances of the 'Chorus', it seems clear that place functions as a shorthand for wider questions regarding representation. The first two Choruses include brief sections, quoted second-hand from the police, in which questions around how space is controlled

¹⁸ There are parallels here to be drawn with Ronald Blythe's 1969 *Akenfield*, in which Blythe created the fictional town of Akenfield 'using conversations he had with people from the hamlet of Debach, where he lived, and its larger neighbour, Charsfield, 10 miles outside Ipswich' (Tapper 2017). James Tapper, in *The Guardian*, described Blythe's portrait of the village as 'part fictional gazetteer, part oral history as told by the villagers' (2017). In Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*, although he did not interview anyone who would go on to make up the voices of the fictional fishing village of Llareggub, there is a similar awareness of a group of voices speaking for and to a particular place.

and who controls space are explored.

We've been through more farms than I could count. Can you imagine creeping through a farmyard at three in the morning trying not to wake the dogs or ducks? Then we'd get out of the car, unlock the gate or lift it off its hinges, and put it back so nobody'd know we'd been through. Then you'd come out and the police'd be round the next corner. 'Where are you going lads?' 'Fishing.' We went 'fishing' a lot. It was cat and mouse.

(Bentley 2011, 10)

The 'voice' from the Chorus draws attention to how the strikers have to 'exploit' and adapt to a place that has been 'corrupted' by state influence.¹⁹ Through the lifting off and replacing of gates, there is the desire to avoid the appearance of having been in the space at all. The strikers are forced into a situation where they become practically complicit in the undermining of their own space and the space of those around them. Conversely, the strikers are able to manipulate their own space, demonstrating a connection to the area and understanding of it that is unavailable to those from outside. Further, the strikers are forced to explore alternative or undesirable spaces after the police have occupied their place—'police waiting round a corner [...] pulled over in our place' (Bentley 2011, 10). It is clear that the relationship between the strikers and their 'place' is a fraught one. Yet, the Chorus and Bentley attempt to reestablish 'our place'. 'Their car pulled over in our place', the final line of the stanza, leads directly into the Chorus where the voice of the strikers are given the space to deliver the final comment of this section of the poem.

As the strikers, even after their 'creeping' and being forced to navigate alternative routes across other people's land, are nonetheless spotted by the police—a situation which appears to be the norm—their claims to the place are undermined. It is the police (and state) who decide where their place is and how they are to function within it. If the police know where the strikers are going to appear, but show no interest in where they have come from—the police only ask where they are going, not where they've been—it stands to reason that the police have allowed the strikers to get as far as they have. It is from the control of space that the police derive their authority: *'They tried to keep us in one spot, so we started walking up and down. One of the inspectors was getting a bit uppity, "You stay there, you say*

¹⁹ According to *Thurcroft*, he was 'male [...] mid 20s Married. Native and resident of adjoining area. Faceworker. 10 years in coal. Regular picket' (1986, 271).

nothing” (Bentley 2011, 12).²⁰ After being kettled, the strikers attempt to regain some of their autonomy through the act of ‘walking up and down’, thereby occupying and pushing to the boundaries of the place into which they have been forced. The fact that the Choruses in the poem are all written in prose, with the ‘line breaks’ dictated by page size, means that the words of the people of Thurcroft begin to ‘fill’ the space in which they are presented, again as if they are pushing at someone else’s borders. Bentley’s own ‘poetic’ sections of the poem ‘occupy’ space, their position linked to their own creation and publication. Bentley’s words have been created for this poem, their place is their own. The narrative he writes is confident in its position as ‘occupier’. The Chorus does not have that luxury. The Chorus is attempting to exist within a place and a time where it is not at home. These voices no longer have the cultural weight to occupy space in the way they did in *Thurcroft*. The police officer’s insistence that the strikers ‘stay there’ and ‘say nothing’ points to the way in which those who control space can begin to control the voices and the stories we tell. Yet, what Bentley is doing is itself a form of controlling these voices. Bentley’s inclusion of this phrase from the police highlights the modes through which voices can become marginalised when other voices come to occupy and control the ‘place’ where these (now marginalised) voices were once heard. Bentley repositions these voices, not to silence them, but to allow them to speak again to a new place and time. As Simon Armitage notes in his book *Walking Home*, whereas ‘prose fills a space, like a liquid poured in from the top [...] poetry *occupies* it, arrays itself in formation, sets up camp and refuses to budge’ (2012, 5). This is what Bentley is attempting with ‘The Two Magicians’. Bentley’s poem creates a place which is then filled with voices which have been ousted from (or been deprived of) their own place. These voices have a place returned to them, which they are allowed to occupy and from which they can establish a presence to be heard again. Even though these voices are removed from their original setting and their names are ‘lost’ in Bentley’s poem, they are inserted into Bentley’s contemporary strike narrative. Their voices are given the opportunity to compete against the dominant narratives that have supplanted them.

*

²⁰ The other ‘Chorus’ quotations from ‘The Two Magicians’ that I was going to include to highlight this point, but which I unfortunately couldn’t quite find space for, were:

‘*They saw us and started chasing us back through the wood.*’ (10)

‘*There’s a cricket field, then a big tip behind it. The lads ran up to the tip, there was 100 police running up behind them [...] The lads ran up on the tip again, round and away.*’ (16)

‘*I kept saying to him “I’m independent now, I can go wherever I want to”.*’ (18)

In this final section of the chapter, I want to examine the work of two poets who have published in the past few years to consider how the 'distance' from the miners' strike 1984-5 and the industrial legacy of the strike in the North East has come to be shaped by outside actors and 'glamorised' narratives. To begin, I will turn again to Helen Mort's *Division Street* to explore the questions that are raised in terms of constructing notions of place through her poetry.²¹ The title, *Division Street*, is a reference to an actual street in Sheffield that is never mentioned in the collection. The name of the street has obvious associations with ideas of inclusion and exclusion that arise from any attempt to claim possession of a place, as well as ideas surrounding social divisions created by the strike. The poem 'Scab', in its first stanza, echoes the collection's title with the line: 'Welcome to Sheffield. Border-land' (Mort 2013, 16). The hyphen in 'border-land' both separates the two sides and holds them together. It is as if the word 'borderland' has been broken apart and reattached. It suggests that Sheffield is not the same place anymore, the components are the same, but it has been reconstructed differently. There is a tension as to what the place is and how it is represented.

A quotation from Michael Symmons Roberts that appears on the back cover of the collection calls the book an 'outstanding debut', while claiming that what underlies it all 'is the bedrock of the north of England, its landscapes and stories'. If we were to consider Roberts' comments in light of the earlier discussion regarding the often contested and occasionally contradictory nature of the North, then what is, according to Mort, the North? Roberts' 'bedrock' seems to speak to some essential foundation of the North and its stories, if such a thing could ever exist. Mort's work presents a North in which this 'bedrock' of the idea(s) of the North, its people and histories, has become almost impossible to separate from the cultural products that seek to represent it.

However, writing for *The Poetry Review*, Joey Connolly vehemently disagrees:

From its confrontational cover image to the "striking miners" of the blurb, to the jacket's daubish font and its Symmons Roberts endorsement evoking "the bedrock of the north of England", everything seems determined to sell this book as being about Sheffield; The North; industrial decline. But it isn't. To insist that Mort is writing about the North is to mistake setting for subject.

²¹ Mort's 'Scab', which much of this section will draw from, has been covered in some detail back in Chapter Two. The section which begins 'This is a reconstruction. Nobody / will get hurt' (2013, 19), and my examination of it in regards to 'collective' union representations, will not be rehashed, but the ideas that I raised earlier regarding what it means to 'reconstruct' do feed into the issues being explored here.

In the poem 'Scab', the North is both setting and subject, in fact, 'setting' is the subject. The poem looks at the way labour narratives of the North East have come to be appropriated and what that means for those people who these narratives purport to represent. What is interesting in both Symmons Roberts' cover quotation and Connolly's response is that the North should take up so much space in their thinking, and seemingly in the thinking of those trying to sell the book.

At this point, I want to turn to a section taken from towards the end of 'Scab':

Years on, we'll make a blockbuster
from this: a film that gives the town
its own brass band, cuts out
the knuckles fringed with blood,
grafts in a panorama of the Moors.
This is our heritage: an actor
artfully roughed up, thirty years
of editing to keep the landfills
out of shot.

(Mort 2013, 22)²³

Due to the 'brass band' reference, the film that Mort is referring to in this section is the Mark Herman directed *Brassed Off* (1996). The film, set roughly ten years after the 1984-5 miners' strike had ended, tells the story of the colliery brass band from the fictional town of 'Grimley'—based on the town of Grimethorpe—and the Coal Board's attempts to shut down the pit.²⁴ In the film, as a result of the debts and hardships they had been saddled with since the strike's end, the miners vote for redundancy and the closure of the pit. The film ends with the colliery brass band winning a national competition. Although

²² Connolly makes the point in his review that 'it is, in the face of the deprivation and communal devastation to which Mort alludes, somewhat difficult to sympathise with the Cambridge student anxiously reconstructing [...] the struggles of the 1980s industrial North as an analogy of class struggle amid the "fish-tail ballgowns" and "free champagne" of Cambridge' (Mort 2013, 21). Kate Kellaway also expresses issues with 'Scab' in her altogether positive review of *Division Street* in *The Guardian*. Kellaway writes that she feels 'Scab' to be 'willed and riskily inauthentic' (2013).

²³ There is a possible reference here to the Moors murderers, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, but, with the period Mort writing about being the aftermath and legacy of the 1984-5 miners' strike, I would think this is simply about the Moors themselves. However, even if this is true, the contention that the 'Moors' might refer to the Moors murders demonstrates a certain quality in the way in which our cultural histories can begin to merge into one another and become impossible to separate out fully.

²⁴ According to a European Union study on deprivation, in 1994 Grimethorpe was the poorest town in the England (McVeigh 2016).

Brassed Off is the most likely reference point for Mort's poem, the films *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Pride* (2014) and to a lesser extent *Made in Dagenham* (2010) and *The Full Monty* (1997), show *Brassed Off* to exist within a broader culture of strike and 'strike legacy' filmmaking.²⁵

As discussed in regards to Bentley, what Mort is attempting to do here is demonstrate how those places that we consider to be our own, and that to an extent help to constitute a 'place-identity', are in fact much more vulnerable than we might like to admit. We can extrapolate on this concept of 'place-identity' by returning to Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff for a moment:

[p]lace-identity is the source of meaning for a given setting by virtue of relevant cognitive clusters that indicate what should happen in it, what the setting is supposed to be like, and how the individual and others are supposed to behave in it.

(1983, 79)

There are broader issues that arise from one's place-identity being reconfigured as, 'since the individual's place-identity mirrors a physical world, the continuing recognition of that world over time gives credence to and support for his or her self-identity' (1983, 79). For those whose 'place-identity is 'compromised', the way they understand the place and their position within it are lost. Without the 'continuing recognition' of place that Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff talk of, we lose a fundamental aspect of that which gives us the ability to construct 'meaning' for ourselves. In the attempt to 'construct' these meanings, people are forced to rely on conceptions of a place that has fundamentally changed. Their narratives and meanings no longer represent a place they see or recognise themselves in.

In the section from 'Scab' above, Mort opens with lines that suggest that this loss of recognition affects both time and place: 'Years on, we'll make a blockbuster / from this' (2013, 22). Mort's phrasing in relation to time and place is ambiguous, with 'years on' dependent on when it is you and Mort imagine now to be. If we take the 'blockbuster' as being *Brassed Off*, we encounter a situation in which a voice from the past—1984-5—is predicting a situation that for us as readers has already come to pass. The voice is already aware that the strike narrative will be constructed by someone else. Yet, even this reading does not take into account that Mort is writing in the early part of the 2010s. As a result, this also becomes a prediction for another, future, 'blockbuster'. The 'strike' stretches backwards and

²⁵ Both *Billy Elliot* and *Pride* deal with questions regarding masculinity and sexuality during the miners' strike. *Made in Dagenham* is about the 1968 Ford sewing machinists' strike and the fight for equal pay. *The Full Monty* is set in the early 1970s, with most characters being former workers in Sheffield's steel trade who had been made redundant as a result the city's declining industrial output

forwards, while inhabiting a present, so that ascribing any sense of its beginnings and endings becomes a matter of cultural guesswork. What is 'this' that the blockbuster will be made from: will it be reminiscences of the strike, as in Bentley? Will it be the Jeremy Deller reenactment and documentary, as discussed in Chapter Two? Will it be Mort's own work? Or, will it be some other cultural product completely? It is impossible to gauge exactly where our labour narratives originate from or what they contain. While Mort says 'we' will make the 'blockbuster', this 'we' is not those involved in the strike. Their 'heritage' is someone else's production. Mort writes of how the 'knuckles fringed with blood' have been 'cut out' and been replaced by an actor 'artfully roughed up'. The 'reality' of the strike has been removed, replaced with a stylisation that provides for a more palatable strike narrative. Even the landscape is stylised with the landfills kept 'out of shot' (Mort 2013, 22). These landfills are still there, but either they are no longer being looked at or there is an encouragement to ignore them, not to see the 'waste' and histories that have been excluded or covered. Mort's 'keep the landfills out' suggests a concern from those making the 'blockbuster' that the landfills will somehow slide back into view. Or that there are those who wish to bring them back into view, bringing with them questions about the North and its past and present that the filmmakers do not wish to confront, a legacy of continuing hardship that does not fit with the filmic narrative. At the end of both *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, there is a stirring public performance that is supposed to represent the 'spirit' of the northern (male) working-classes. The endings are uplifting, but in neither film are there jobs for the workers. *Billy Elliot* ends with Billy performing *Swan Lake*, his miner father watching from the audience. The implication is of a bright future, but one that was only achieved after leaving the North East.

What appears through this section of the poem are words that while being used to describe the blockbuster are also the language of labour. These words and the workers they represented have now been co-opted for (and by) the 'blockbuster'. Mort uses the phrases 'make', 'brass', 'grafts' 'cuts' and, at a push, 'blockbuster', all to speak to a process, making films, that is removed from the jobs that they once represented. There is no longer an industry for these words to signal or speak to. These words now speak to a different form of labour. If your words no longer mean the same thing, there is a gap created in which your narratives become disconnected and no longer speak to the present. Or, more specifically, the narratives no longer communicate with a present you recognise. They have been taken to represent a different narrative and history. The ability of the workers to tell their own labour narratives has been removed. The 'blockbuster' has coopted the strike narratives to tell stories that, while 'sounding' the same as the ones that have 'always' been told, do not mean the same things. They do not tell the same

story from the same people. The legacy of the miners' strike has been appropriated by the people producing the 'blockbuster' so that it is their version of the story which is now being told.

This appropriation of labour narratives also speaks to employment, and the inadequacy of work following the closure of so much industry in the North East. While the films *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty* speak to the issues around finding work for miners and ex-steel industry workers, Mort, by using the words of 'industry' and labour to talk about making films, is showing that what has replaced industry and the jobs that have been 'created' in the aftermath of this decline are 'unsuitable' for those who worked in industry. These jobs, predominantly in the service industry, while providing an income, albeit precariously, do not replace or replicate the cultural and social 'status' that working in more manual forms of industry would have afforded.²⁶ These are jobs that in no way compensate for the ones that have been lost. As Owen Jones states,

as well as being poorly paid, many of the service sectors jobs have a markedly lower status than the manufacturing jobs they replaced. Miners and factory workers had a real pride in the work they were doing. Miners were supplying the country's energy needs; factory workers had the satisfaction of investing skill and energy into making things that people needed. The jobs were well regarded in the community.

(2012, 158)

Although Jones may make his assertion a little too strongly, his point is undoubtedly correct; the shift from well-unionised, 'constructive' employment to a casualised service sector means not only a drop in 'status', but a thorough reconfiguration of your role within a 'community'. This shift means that you no longer have the same role to play in constructing these narratives of place and your ability to see yourself in the 'place narrative' is undermined. This reconfiguration, or the inability to fully reconfigure

²⁶An article from *The Guardian* about the town of Grimethorpe talks about how 'unemployment during the 1990s stood at over 50%' and that 'those young enough and with transferable skills moved elsewhere' (2015). The article itself is entitled 'Grimethorpe, the mining village that hit rock bottom - then bounced back'. While it talks of how the fashion retailer ASOS had opened their UK distribution centre in Grimethorpe, this is an Asos centre that just over 18 months later was being written about again in *The Guardian* for employing agency workers on a 'flexing clause'. This 'flexing clause' meant that workers could arrive at the warehouse only to be informed that they would be starting two hours later (with these two hours unpaid), or have to work two hours later in the evening, with disciplinary action arising for those who refuse to do so (Shaheen 2016). Asos had been using the same employment agency, Transline, that ran the Sports Direct warehouse which had been found to have been effectively paying many of its temporary workers below minimum wage due to the excessive, unpaid, searches carried out at the beginning and end of every shift. Also, the company would dock workers 15 minutes pay for clocking in even one minute late and workers could incur a 'strike'—accumulating six over a six-month period would result in dismissal—for anything from 'excessive chatting' to 'horseplay' (Goodley 2015). In May 2017, ASOS ended its deal with Transline (Butler 2017).

oneself in light of this shift, leads to one's 'place-identity', that which defines 'who the person is, how he or she is to behave, and what he or she is worth', becoming compromised. Without the ability to affix yourself within the narrative, it becomes vulnerable. These narratives have been taken from the people they are supposed to represent. These are filmic narratives and happy endings that in no way speak to the cultural and economic present.

Steve Ely makes the point regarding the casualisation of work and the 'Hollywoodisation' of the North East even more strongly in the poem 'Objective One' by invoking *Asos*, *Brassed Off*, *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot*. Ely talks with no small sense of sarcasm of 'Asos and Next PLC [...] bringing light to parochial darkness, / access, investment, enterprise, jobs: / until sterling collapses', until the point at which

[...] the provincia flips once more
to wrecking-ball brownfield bomb-site,
the full monty of dole and dereliction,
where brassed-off, hand-to-mouth yokels
are abandoned to dearth and absurdity,
their eh-bah-gum tutu dreams.

(2015, 150)

Ely's 'full monty of dole and dereliction' speaks as a way of showing how these 'Hollywood' depictions of the North East have become ingrained in the labour narratives of the North.²⁷ The phrase 'full monty' is now not simply the title of a movie, but part of the lexicon for an economically depressed North East. These films are feeding back into and augmenting the labour narratives of the North East. However, what has occurred is that these artful depictions have come to appropriate and supplant the narratives of the people who are actually living with these hardships so that it is these films that come to the fore in our thinking about the North. These movies and the narratives they depict are part of the North East's cultural legacy.

The problem with these cultural products becoming our reference points is that the strike becomes something that is 'artfully' rendered, the edges and 'realities' of the struggle removed or smoothed out by the outside, all the while being presented as 'our heritage' (Mort 2013, 22). Mort's 'our heritage' serves as both a condemnation of the way the strike and the places in which it took place have come to

²⁷ I am not claiming that these movies necessarily glamorise the struggles of the working classes, but they do unquestionably create an image of economically depressed Northern towns where problems can be solved by turning to stripping, playing the tenor horn or ballet dancing. Again, this is not intentionally dismissive, the films mentioned do play a key role in understanding how it is the history of industrial decline in the North has come to be seen and they do raise some important questions regarding post and pre-industrial masculinity.

be portrayed, and a comment on the way 'contextual reconstructions' of any event can be 'passed down to become a tradition' (Carver 1998, 163). Although Mort's poem states that 'we'll make a blockbuster', that 'we' is not the 'we' who were involved in the strike, it is a 'we' who have been able to appropriate the strike for their own ends, to make money and to entertain. The story of the strike becomes larger than the strikers and the areas in which it was fought, yet not in a way which empowers those who were involved.

Mort herself, in the poem 'Pit Closure as a Tarantino Short', poetically creates a future 'blockbuster', while exploring how our stories become compromised. Mort's poem opens with the lines:

The Suit who pulled the trigger left
a card between the victim's fingers,
printed white on red.
Business Closed was all it said.

(2013, 25)

Mort is reframing the strike, but more specifically the Tory party's pit closure programme, in the vein of a Hollywood movie, a movie that has only two sides, the villain—the Suit or state—and the victim. In *The New Yorker*, film critic Richard Brody writes of Tarantino that 'the world that he imagines and admires, one without reconciliation, is essentially and crudely adolescent, a version of history as blood feuds in which anger begets anger and revenge breeds revenge as he watches from the superior position of the cinematic referee, at a safe historical distance' (2012). In 'Scab', the 'knuckles fringed with blood' have been cut out and replaced by an 'artfully roughed up' actor, while here they have both been supplanted by the stylistically excessive violence of a Tarantino movie. This 'movie' is not the comedy-drama of *Brassed Off* or *Billy Elliot*, but something altogether more troubling. By 'reimagining' the pit closure as a Tarantino movie, the 1984-5 strike and the decimation of the mining industry are presented at a 'safe historical distance', a distance created by time and by the inclusion of the 'cinematic referee'. The 'safety' of this distance means that the subtlety and political and labour circumstances that led to both the pit closures and the strike of 1984-5 can be removed. The 'cinematic referee' is a creation willing to testify about the strike's 'character' and one who makes sure certain unknowable rules are adhered to about

how the story is told.²⁸ The end of the poem reads:

he met the dead man's stare
and noticed how the bullet hole
between those two dark eyes
made a black ellipsis; then he swore

he heard the dead man's voice
above the heartbeat of the clock:
Nothing's finished, only given up.
Before he left, he checked the lock.
(Mort 2013, 25)

The Suit kills the victim and there is a sense that at some point vengeance will be sought. Mort's line echoes W.H. Auden's sentiment, a paraphrase of one by Paul Valéry, that 'a poem is never finished; it is only abandoned' (2007, xxx).²⁹ Whereas Auden's 'abandoned' suggests something having been left behind or unfinished, Mort's 'given up' adds the sense of surrender, along with something being relinquished. The struggles and the legacy of the pit closures are not finished, their impact is still being felt, but the narratives that are being told have been parted with. These stories have been surrendered and what they will be replaced by is almost a satire of the miners' strike. These stories are told by people from the 'outside', by those who only see the narrative 'potential' of the miners' strike. Although, it is the state which destroyed the mining industry over a period of years and the 1984-5 miners' strike only lasted twelve months, in the poem this decimation of the mining industry is reduced to a single violent act. This act is symbolic of the whole, but it presents the legacy of the miners' strike as a solitary scene, a scene that positions the miners and their families solely as victims. It is a 'Hollywood' performance of a history. The 'victims' are without a past and with only a vengeful future to look forward to. The violence obscures the struggles, both historic and ongoing faced by miners, their families and those working in the industrial North East. Mort's shifting of Auden's 'a poem' is never finished to 'nothing' is finished suggests that it is not simply poems that are 'abandoned' and taken up by others, but also labour narratives. The story is never finished, but they are given up to others to continue with them, to continue a legacy or to 'corrupt' it. As Massey says, 'the identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how these histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant' (1995, 186). Mort is producing what she believes could become a 'dominant' history, that of a movie which

²⁸ The 'cinematic referee' operates in a similar fashion to the 'battle specialists' from 'Scab' who were discussed in Chapter Two.

²⁹ Valéry's original line was that 'a poem is never finished; it's always an accident that puts a stop to it — i.e. gives it to the public' ('Paul Valéry' 2016).

after 'thirty years of editing' removes the strikers and replaces them with a 'dead man's stare' (2013, 22 & 25). Yet, the 'ellipsis' shows that something has been removed from the narrative. It is a warning that in these retellings something is lost. Mort's 'Tarantino short' is almost a satire of strike narratives. In 'Scab', Mort questions the happy ending model of *Brassed Off* and strike movies. In 'Pit Closure as a Tarantino Short', she satirises the way in which the 1984-5 strike has come to be seen for its narrative potential, its ability to shock and entertain. Mort creates a hyper stylised strike narrative through her poem to expose how labour narratives are manipulated and how they are told (and sold) to the public.

These filmic narratives re-establish the concerns of the strike within the minds of a wider public in a fashion which allows the story of the strike to be taken away from those who lived it. 'Thirty years of editing' has taken place, both erasing and inserting 'scenes' and 'characters' into the narrative, to the point whereby you end up being confronted solely by edits of past edits. In a similar fashion to the book *Thurcroft* and the Bentley poem, these edited (documentary) texts become themselves vulnerable to appropriation. The 'heritage' becomes unrecognisable as a representation of the place and the people it supposedly portrays. Mort suggests that these acts of 'rendering' can become so removed from their source that the 'politics' which the original act was supposed to highlight is lost or buried beneath the drive to entertain. Yet, while aware of these contradictions, it is still impossible to ignore the part that these retellings have on attempts to confront and challenge the legacy of the miners' strike 1984-5. These retellings are inextricably tied up in the conceptions and narratives of the places about which these poets write. Bentley's poem provides a place for those voices which have become excluded from strike narratives, giving them a place in which to reestablish themselves and to challenge dominant narratives. For Mort and Ely, these voices have already been supplanted. Mort and Ely draw attention to the way in which the films present strike narratives that in no way reflect or speak to the social or economic present of the North East. These narratives do not empower those living with the reality of industrial decline, they exclude them.

Chapter Five: Other Poetic Responses

'I send you a *sonnet*. I do not expect you to publish it, but you may show it to whom you please.'

- Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Letters Vol. 2* (1964)

The previous chapters have looked at how two generations of poets have responded to union and strike narratives. These poems call into question the nature of these narratives by foregrounding the selective means by which they are constructed. With this chapter, I will consider two 'official' poetic responses to the 1984-5 miners' strike. In 1984, the NUM published a collection of miners' poetry, *Against All The Odds*, and, in 1985, the Poet Laureate Ted Hughes published the poem 'The Best Worker in Europe'. *Against All The Odds* is a poetry of witness, written by those involved in the 1984-5 strike, while Hughes' poem is part of the 'institutional' poetic response to the strike. By considering these two ends of the poetic spectrum, this chapter will explore how these poetic responses are attempting to establish narratives of an event before its legacy has come to crystallise.

I. *Against All The Odds*

Against All The Odds is unique in being the only collection of poetry to be published by the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984-5 strike – and the only collection to have ever been published by the Union, although the NUM's official magazine, *The Miner*, published individual poems from time to time.¹ Unsurprisingly, with the collection being published during the strike 1984-5, all money raised from sales of the book went back to supporting miners and their families. The money raised from postal sales of the collection went to the NUM's centralised Miners' Hardship Fund, while local Miners' Support Groups could buy reduced priced copies of the book that could then be 'resold in aid of local funds' (Jones & Ross 1984, 52). As poetry sales are relatively small, the decision to use such a medium is an unusual one.² In the end, *Against All The Odds* was the only poetry collection published by the NUM. The fact remains that poetry was one of the forms that was turned to by the Union as a method by which to

¹ Maurice Jones, the editor of *The Miner* between 1982 and 1989, also wrote the foreword to *Against All The Odds*.

² In 2016, poetry sales in the UK were expected to pass the £10m mark for the first time ever, buoyed in large part by a number of younger writers self-publishing collections after building a large following on social media platforms—Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*, which after its self-published run was picked up by Andrews McMeel Publishing and has sold over 1.4 million copies worldwide, being the most successful of them (Cowdrey 2016). Yet, although the numbers for poetry are increasing, £10m still only accounts for 0.00625% of the UK's £1.6bn sales figures for 2016 (Kean 2017a).

fundraise during the 1984-5 strike, along with poetry readings themselves as methods by which to raise money.³ The role of poetry, and *Against All the Odds* in particular, can be seen as a way of writers (both professional and not) articulating an experience, specifically their experience of the miners' strike. It is a way of creating a sense of community, not necessarily a poetic one, but one of shared experience and struggle. In John Field's 1987 essay 'Making history: Writings from the British Coalfields', he sees the publication of just a single collection of poetry by the NUM to be a missed opportunity:

Official labor movement organizations, in Britain at least, are unaware of the potential of cultural practice—oral, musical, dramatic and written—to go beyond running commentary on the boss or *ad hoc* fund raising, and move toward construction of a wider class struggle.

(1987, 137)

While the NUM's purpose behind publishing the collection may have been 'ad hoc fund raising', those who contributed to the collection clearly see their contribution differently. In the 'Foreword' to the collection, Maurice Jones anticipates the work of future critics and scholars and shows a self-consciousness about the historical significance of the volume as testimony. He writes:

In the years to come historians and analysts will give their endless judgements on the strike of '84, trying to grasp the essence of the people who took part and supported this most titanic of labour struggles. We believe the essence is captured in these poems.

(Jones 1984, 1)

Jones knows that the strike is a defining moment in late-twentieth century British history, but he situates the collection as one of people's 'essence', rather than ideas. While the strike is ongoing, you support the people who are striking. The NUM is not mentioned at all by Jones. The collection is about the '150,000 striking miners and their families' (Jones 1984, 1). The collection is about establishing strike narratives and capturing strikers' voices. Field goes on to state that after producing *Against All The Odds*, the NUM 'showed no lasting interest in the remarkable cultural growth that this represented' (1987, 137).⁴

³ During the 1972 miners' strike, poet Tom Pickard had organised a poetry reading at the University of Newcastle 'for the benefit of the miners striking against the Tory government's wage restrictions' (Duncan & Mottram 2007, 71). The poets involved in the reading, along with Pickard, included Tony Harrison, Barry MacSweeney, Bob Cobbing, Alex Glasgow, Adrian Mitchell, Jeff Nuttall, Brian Patten and Jon Silkin.

⁴ Interestingly, in the two general elections preceding the 1984-5 strike, the Labour party had made the Arts one of the cornerstones of their election manifestos. In 1979, Labour promised to increase aid to the Arts Council by 25% and in 1983 they pledged to make the arts 'zero-rated' in regards to VAT ('British Labour Party Election Manifesto: 1979 [Archive]' and 'British Labour Party Election Manifesto: 1983 [Archive]'). However, although the musical collective Red Wedge were prominent in the lead up to the 1987 election, the Labour Party's manifesto did not include any provision for increasing funding for the Arts ('British Labour Party Election Manifesto, 1987 [Archive]').

One of the first 'poetic responses' to the miners' strike 1984-5, Tony Harrison's 'V.', was published in November 1985, roughly six months after the strike's conclusion. *Against All The Odds* occupies a position of immediacy that the 'mainstream' publication market did not adopt. *Against All Odds* being published by the NUM means that the poems contained within the collection comprise almost a union-sanctioned (poetic) response to the strike, as it was ongoing. The collection is expressly in response to and about the 1984-5 miners' strike. This is poetry from the 'front line', poetry written as a response to an event that had yet to end, a poetry of witness. The book itself was published in September 1984, roughly six months into the strike, and six months before its disheartening end.⁵ The poems included in the book are about the struggle and the experience of the miners' strike, not its legacy, as that had yet to come. Shirley Dent, in *The Guardian*, said of the collection that 'collectively it has two strengths: raw anger and a sense of history in the making' (2009). The poems in the book see the strike as historic, but they also paint the success of the strike for the miners as near inevitable. Eileen Reddish's 'England - 1984' proclaims that 'the miners will win' and that they'll win because they are 'right' (1984, 5). This is poetry as a stimulus or encouragement for continued support. The poems are written by people who want to believe, or make others believe, that the strike is going well. These are poems to rally.

The manifesto did pledge to establish a 'Ministry for the Arts and Media', but with no specific funding increase part of the pledge. The main thrust of the 1987 manifesto, unsurprisingly after the miners' strike and with unemployment standing at over 11% at the beginning of the year ('Unemployment Rate (Aged 16 And Over, Seasonally Adjusted)' 2018), was jobs. The second sentence of the manifesto read that the choice the UK electorate had to face was between 'Labour's programme of work for people and Tory policies of waste of people' ('British Labour Party Election Manifesto, 1987 [Archive]').

Red Wedge was a collective fronted by a number of prominent left-wing and Labour supporting musicians, including Billy Bragg and Paul Weller, who toured in advance of the 1987 elections, ostensibly to bring politics to young people around the UK. As the Red Wedge's press officer, Neil Spencer said that:

As well as playing gigs, the musicians had to do press conferences, a lot of meeting and greeting, mixing with local MPs and union dignitaries, people who had never encountered rock musicians and were, frankly, out of their depth.

They expected the tour to be a gong-banging exercise for the Labour party, but we were much more ambivalent about it. So you had these very stolid, long-term party members suddenly finding themselves confronted by young people who wanted to talk about the environment, gay rights, minorities, and to get all these things on the Labour party agenda.

(Spencer in Black 2015)

⁵ September 1984, coincidentally, was also the month in which the strike was declared 'officially' illegal by the high court, as a result of the NUM's 'failure' to hold a national ballot on the proposed strike action.

With this in mind, I want to turn my attention to the first poem that appears in *Against All The Odds*, Bill Simms' 'To a Bottom One', which I will quote in full.

All the miners in the land,
Your forefathers fought for you.
Our turn now to make a stand,
Return their favour true.

All the miners in the land.
Would wish to keep their jobs.
So lend your brother a helping hand.
And picket with the Kens and Bobs.

All the miners in the land,
Know stocks are wearing thin
Like a timer shedding sand -
The bottom one would win.

All the miners in the land,
Together we'll win the day.
Whatever may the Tories plan,
The Union's here to stay.

(1984, 2)

This being the opening poem in the book, it becomes something of a placeholder, 'staking a claim' for the collection as a whole. The 'refrain' which opens each verse by calling to 'all the miners in the land' acts as a rallying cry. The poet calls to those miners out on strike, those becoming disheartened by a seemingly unending dispute and those around the UK who are not on strike. It is their work as miners that binds them first and foremost and, with the repetition of the line, it is the terms in which they should see themselves. What this line does, particularly when coupled with the ABAB rhyme scheme that Simms employs, is to set up an 'us' and 'them' dynamic – the miners as 'us' and a 'them' which includes both the Tories and to an extent the general populace. There is a clear notion of the audience to whom this work is addressed, other miners and their families. What is ironic regarding the book's audience is that, due to the hardships miners and their families faced during the 1984-5 strike, most of the people buying *Against All The Odds* would have been those from non-mining communities who wanted to support those miners who were striking.⁶

⁶ Unfortunately, this is really only speculation. I have tried contacting the NUM but they have not replied and I can find no archive material relating the collection itself or as to whether these poems were ever performed.

The first stanza of Simms' poem plays to other miners' sense of a shared history to situate the strike within a lineage of industrial action.⁷ The poem recalls the miners' 'forefathers' and their struggles, and asserts that it is the current miners' turn to repay the 'favour'. Mining is presented not as a choice, but as a family business (as it often was) and a tradition. Mining is presented not just as the job that an individual worker does, not simply a form of employment, but as a (familial) history of working-class struggle itself. The terms in which Simms writes are unambiguous: it is the language of conflict. However, with the previous miners' strike only taking place ten years before the strike of 1984-5, Simms' 'forefathers' can be seen as the miners' younger selves. It is not just to previous generations that the miners of the 1984-5 strike owe a debt, but to themselves to continue to protect all they had fought for just a decade before. Simms' ABAB rhyming, accompanied by the repeated refrain, means that we are left with a sense of stasis, of an industry contending with its own history. This history, particularly in the context of recent (and repeated) struggles between workers and the Tory government, is one that at least needs to be acknowledged. The refrain simultaneously calls backwards to those who have been on strike and fought for workers' rights over generations and forwards to those who will be affected and shaped by the legacy of the 1984-5 miners' strike and the wider context of industrial decline in the UK. The refrain is what drives the poem forward, it is what controls the nature of each stanza. At the same time, it is also the refrain which points towards the poem's biggest 'fear'. Without the refrain, its constant repetition, its reinforcement of an idea and its refusal to go quietly and let itself slip away, there is the underlying concern that the miners' 'message' and the history of the miners is liable to be lost, forgotten, or intentionally obscured.

'To a Bottom One' is hardly an anomaly within the collection. The concerns with history, family and the 'them' and 'us' dynamic between the miners and the Tory government are laced through the book. *Against All The Odds*, to which over forty writers contributed, contains between forty and fifty poems, with one of the editors, Bill Ross, being the only contributor to have more than one entry. Ross' two poems are the outliers, poetic eulogies for two miners, David Jones and Joe Green, who died during the first few months of the strike.⁸ J. McMillan's 'They'll Never Smash the NUM' and R. Colens' '1984' call on the workers to 'unite' behind the NUM against the 'fools who cross the picket line' (McMillan 1984, 17 &

⁷ During the twentieth century, there had been official miners' strikes in 1912, 1921, 1972, 1974 and 1984-5. There had also been an unofficial strike in 1969 in which roughly half of the UK's collieries participated.

⁸ Jones died on the 15th March 1984 'amid violent scenes outside Ollerton Colliery'. Green was crushed by a lorry while out picketing in Ferrybridge, West Yorkshire, dying on 15th June 1984 ('Dead Miners "Never Be Forgotten"' 2009). The taxi driver, David Wilkie, who was killed when a concrete post was dropped on his car by two striking miners as he took a strike-breaking miner to work, died on the 30th November 1984, a few months after the collection had been first published.

Colens 1984, 2-3). These are the only poems that explicitly reference the NUM—with Scargill himself only being invoked on a handful of occasions. This is about the strikes. The name that appears most frequently through the collection is the Chairman of the National Coal Board, Ian MacGregor, whose job it was to drastically reduce the size of, and reliance on, the coal industry in the UK—‘Ian MacGregor under contract, / Assigned to the Coal Boards for political impact, / Crushing unions, axeing jobs his profession’ (Roberts 1984, 44). Second to MacGregor is Margaret Thatcher, the person who put him in the post—‘Maggie Thatcher - Iron Lady / Very clever and very shady’ (Roberts 1984, 44).⁹ However, all of these figures are secondary to what seems to be the collection’s driving concern, that of honouring the history of labour activism, mining and mineworkers and the impact the strike would have on future generations. There are poems that reference the General Strike of 1926—‘The Big Fight’ and ‘Black Leg’—and others that invoke the Tolpuddle martyrs—‘150 Years On’ and ‘Tolpuddle, July 1st. 1984: The Red Balloon’.¹⁰ The poems are a way of situating the 1984-5 strike as part of a legacy of industrial struggle in the UK, but also as a way of glorifying the role the miners have played in the UK’s political history—‘The second war began, / And suddenly the miners, / Were heroes to a man.’ (Davitt 1984, 11). There is the suggestion of a ‘debt’ that is owed to those who had been sent ‘down that hell hole’ and yet ‘took the blows and kicks, / When the miners were defeated, / In Nineteen-twenty-six’ (Davitt 1984, 10). However, what is most affecting is the voice of the child in some of the poems or the poems written to children. Interestingly, these are often written by women in the collection.¹¹ Whether it is the child asking ‘why is Daddy crying, Mam?’ in ‘Tell it to the Children’ (Walker 1984, 28) or the father saying he ‘won’t sit back and watch’ his son ‘signing on the dole’ (Jenkins 1984, 47), there is a sense that the miners are fighting for their children’s futures, but also their ‘communities’ at large. There is a fear that the miners and their families are not being heard, that they are ‘the silent majority’ (O’Cofaigh 1984, 39). There is an awareness of the working class as a ‘majority’ which is becoming politically and socially ‘silenced’. The concerns with history and legacy are a way of remembering from where the writers have come, while the children represent a form of anxiety about the future and a loss of ‘voice’ in the telling of their own narratives. For Helen Mort and Paul Bentley at least, they are these children now grown up and attempting to make sense of these legacies.

⁹ Chapter Two includes more discussion of MacGregor and his role within the miners’ strike 1984-5.

¹⁰ The Tolpuddle martyrs were a group of Dorset farmers arrested in 1834 for swearing a secret oath of membership to the ‘Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers’. These ‘friendly societies’ were essentially a form of ‘insurance’ for workers: members would pay into the society and receive money back if they were ever taken sick or ill. The six ‘martyrs’ were sentenced to be sent to Australia. However, they were eventually pardoned and arrived back to the UK in 1839.

¹¹ Many of the poems have only the first initial of the writer’s first name, so it is impossible to discern who wrote the poems.

It is this fear of a loss of history and voice that Shaw invokes when she states that

[s]trikers' poetry highlights the written word as a site for the struggle over the legitimacy of the authority of reality, encouraging twenty-first century readers to confront and acknowledge those denied authority, authorship—the right to communicate an account of conflict—and to question the significance of the forms in which accounts are recorded. Significantly, strikers' writings challenge common presumptions about what exactly constitutes historical evidence.

(2012, 11)

Strikers' poetry for Shaw is another space in which these 'struggles' may be fought, a space in which the 'right' to contend with and contest those accounts which have sought to silence or exclude strikers' voices and 'realities' can be 'recorded' and heard.¹² Shaw's book, *Mining the Meaning: Cultural Representations of the 1984-5 Miners' Strike*, examines these, as she terms them, 'formerly dismissed documents'—predominantly poetry, but also other representations of the strike in literature and on screen—in an attempt to 'move beyond existing accounts of the strike, towards the construction of a wider multi-vocal cultural history' (2012, 2). Theirs is a poetry of witness. Yet, the poems fall back on stereotyped ideas about the nature of poetry. The ABAB rhyme schemes that many of the poems in *Against All The Odds* employ is 'naive'. It is poetry at its most accessible and poetry that, without disparagement, has little interest in or awareness of (formally) modern poetry. Unlike the poetry in the rest of this thesis, this poetry is not engaged in the 'literary'. While in Shaw's book strikers' poetry is offered as a 'source of articulation both in and of conflict' (2012, 6), my work is interested in poetry as an 'articulation' of the legacies of conflict(s).

Shaw's *Mining the Meaning* provided a jumping off point for my own work. Shaw's book focusses more on what could be termed a poetry of 'witness', poetry written by those involved in the strike itself. One of the works Shaw draws from is Jean Gittins' *Striking Stuff* (1985).¹³ (Again, proceeds from this book went directly to the miners' relief fund.) In the collection, Gittins adopts various 'strike' voices, from miners, to pickets, to children of miners, in order to critique attitudes regarding community and structures of institutional power—'A Yorkshire picket / What we do for love, they're doing for th' pay'

¹² Something similar can be seen in the *Poems for Grenfell Tower* collection that is discussed later in the chapter.

¹³ Physical copies of Gittins' work are rather scarce. However, *Striking Stuff* can be accessed and read on the 1 in 12 Publications Collective website—www.1in12.com—(the original publishers of the collection) for free. The name of the publishers—1 in 12—comes from the anarchist members club of the same name founded in Bradford in 1981. The name is a reference to the unemployment rate in the UK when the collective was founded, in a similar fashion to the UB40 song, '1 in 10'. In 1981, unemployment in the UK rose from roughly 8% (approximately 1 in 12) to 11% (over 1 in 10) by the year's end ('United Kingdom Unemployment Rate: 1971-2018').

(Gittins, 'The Yorkshire Picket Song'). Katy Shaw wrote of Gittins' work, in the online newspaper *The London Economic*, that 'home-life and working-class culture are put in direct competition with an active, participatory social life' (2015). I'm not convinced by Shaw's assertion that this is a competition at all. 'Home-life' and an active 'social life' need not be binaries. This is also not the case in Gittins' work. In 'A Sad Tale of A Striker's Bride', the 'bride' of the title forgoes her dream wedding, because the strike is called, for 'the Registry Office / with only us Dads and us Mams', but declares that she will support her husband regardless: 'Cause when this lot's over, ah'm glad ah can say / Well, leastways ah married a man' (Gittins). Shaw writes that the character of the anonymous bride, through her individual experience, 'is forced to confront the wider strike collective, engaging with a common cause' while also 'placing the political firmly before the personal' (Shaw 2012, 64). However, there does not seem to be this form of competition in the poem at all. What Shaw overlooks in the poem is that the personal is shaped by and made to be the political. Marrying 'a man', a striking miner, is a political statement. The political is not placed 'firmly before the personal', it is part of it. Carolyn Forché writes, in the introduction to the anthology *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*, that 'the poetry of witness reclaims the social from the political and in so doing defends the individual against illegitimate forms of coercion' (1993, 45). Forché's formulation seems a better one than Shaw's in that it sees the social as being inherently political from the start. Previous chapters have looked at what happens after these 'official' narratives have been created and how poetry can come to challenge them, after the fact, after narratives have already experienced these 'forms of coercion'. Gittins' direct involvement with the strike, two of her sons worked at Ledston Luck Colliery, clearly positions her as 'witness'. Gittins is attempting to establish a 'strikers' narrative', as the realities of the strike are unfolding, and at the same time as 'official' narratives are being created by the state.

In Shaw's work, the poetry that she examines was written predominantly during the 1984-5 strike itself. The speed at which a poem can be written and disseminated means that it is often during times of upheaval, in both a heartening and mournful sense of the term, that we turn to poetry—both in writing and 'receiving' it. *Poems for Grenfell Tower* is a more recent example of this. The collection was published as a response to the fire that broke out in Grenfell Tower, West London, on 14th June 2017 which caused the deaths of 72 people. While Grenfell Tower was located in one of London's wealthiest constituencies, Kensington and Chelsea, the vicinity in which the tower block itself stood was 'among the

10% most deprived areas in England in 2015' (Barry 2017).¹⁴ The foreword to the book, written by Labour politician and MP for Tottenham David Lammy, says that:

Poems for Grenfell Tower encourages readers to listen and bear witness to the human cost of Grenfell. The poems are able to express the scale of loss, in a way that prose is not able to do [...] Unlike countless newspaper articles and reports in the media, poetry goes some of the way in allowing the reader to understand what is really missing - a child in a schoolroom, a much loved daughter.

(2018, 1)

This term 'witness' appears again. Lammy comments upon the role that poetry can play in times of loss, but does not really go into detail about what unique quality he sees poetry as having over prose to convey these feelings. Yet, Lammy does say that poetry allows readers to understand 'what is really missing', that poetry is somehow able to fill gaps in the narrative, to highlight those overlooked, to make the political, personal—'a child in a schoolroom, a much loved daughter'. Later in his foreword, he reaffirms this idea by stating that poems 'are able to go beyond the limits of prose in expressing the impact of the tragedy' (Lammy 2018, 2). Lammy talks of poetry's ability to 'express scale', to go 'beyond the limits', it is not limited to pre-established boundaries of form or content. Lammy's idea ties into the suggestion that it is poetry that is often turned to when we are seeking some form of guidance or solace in times of disturbance or tragedy. How this collection differs from *Against All The Odds* is that a number of the contributors are poets of some standing. Medbh McGuckian contributes 'The Role of Bluest Reason', in which the narrator asks when will 'the earth finally become conscious / of that heavy gasping, wind-aided spread / of buoyant hot gas under the ceiling?' (2018, 89). While George Szirtes' 'The Burning of the House' takes aim at the state by claiming that there is 'no narrative, scheme or plot, / It's

¹⁴ Residents had long raised issues regarding the lack of fire alarms and the absence of a sprinkler system in the tower, but had been ignored by the Kensington and Chelsea tenant management organisation (KCTMO) that managed the tower. Less than a year before the fire, the Grenfell Action Group, a local residents campaign group, 'had warned of "dangerous living conditions" and said: "It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO"' (Wahlquist & Booth 2017). Tragically, the Action Group were to be proved right. The inquest into the fire, which is still ongoing at the time of writing in August 2018, has so far heard evidence that 'Grenfell Tower was riddled with faults that accelerated the fire and made survival harder'. Dr Barbara Lane, a technical expert, said 'a "culture of non-compliance" had meant more than 100 fire doors failed fire regulations' (Booth 2018). MP David Lammy was one of the most outspoken politicians after the fire. In a statement to *The Metro* newspaper the day after the fire, Lammy called the fire 'corporate manslaughter', before going on to state that: 'This is an outrage. We are hearing time and time again how the local authority and property management company ignored the warnings of the residents. This tragic loss of life was clearly preventable and in the richest borough in our country it is absolutely not acceptable that people should lose their lives in this way' (Lammy in Morley 2017). Similarly, MP Emma Dent Coad called the tragedy 'unforgivable' and said that 'there was a clear link between the council's determination to redevelop the area, to build new, non-social housing, and the tragedy' (Gentleman 2017).

just the system, just another flaw' (2018, 21). These poems are included alongside ex-Children's laureate Michael Rosen's 'The Chair', punk-poet Attila the Stockbroker's 'Keeping Up Appearances', poet Anne Stevenson's 'A Report from the Border', former head of a nursery school Christine Barton's 'Red Watch' and many more, some of whom identify in their biographies as writers and poets and others who do not. However, only two of the poets, according to their biographies, have a direct connection with the fire. 'The Voices of Grenfell Tower', by Alemu Tebeje—an 'Ethiopian exile poet who lost several neighbours in the fire' (62 Poets 2018, 98)—is written in Amharic with a parallel translation and is the most visceral of the collection. Tebeje writes that 'burning souls have burning voices' and implores himself to 'be their guarantee of truth!' (2018, 44). This poem is part of the guarantee, a document of 'witness' that says this tragedy happened. Almost half the lines of Tebeje's poem end with the word 'calling'. These are the shouts of people whose voices weren't heard, until it was too late. The poem is a way of saying that these voices will be remembered, and should have been heard. The other poet who was present at Grenfell Tower, Ricky Nuttall, is a firefighter who attended the scene. Nuttall's poem, 'The Firefighter', describes him being 'emotionally ruined' and dealing with 'the feeling of failure / and pride that combine' after the fire is finally extinguished (2018, 27). Nuttall's poem is a way for him to express the grief he feels. It is a way of articulating the unseen costs of the fire, costs that would not have been reported otherwise. What can be seen with this collection is that this is not the 'naive' poetry of *Against All The Odds*. Rip Bulkeley, the editor of the collection, put out a call through the Poetry Library, the Poetry Society and posted beside 'other announcements near Grenfell memorial walls', among other places, and finally received 346 poems from 'about 300 poets in several countries' (Bulkeley 2018).¹⁵ These 346 poems were edited down to the sixty-two that appear in the collection. The 'quality' of the poems are essential to the collection as a whole. Yet, this is poetry for a mass audience. The book's dedication, 'For the victims of Grenfell Tower', is written in over forty languages, with English seventh on the list. The collection's cover quotes are not taken from cultural icons or literary figures but from ten 'ordinary people': an EFL teacher, a hairdresser, an account executive, a lighting designer and so on. The cover quotes talk of how powerful the poems are, how emotive, how the collection of voices acts as 'touching expressions of collective and individual anguish' (62 Poets 2018). *Poems for Grenfell Tower* is a collection that attempts to use poetry as a way of critiquing the underlying socio-economic and political factors that led to the tragedy. It is also a collection that is put together to provide a certain space, a guide almost, for reflection, mourning and remembrance. This is poetry, written by poets, but for the public at large.

¹⁵ Bulkeley did say that he was disappointed at the number of submissions he received and speculated that he was sure 'excellent poems were not submitted because their authors never received the call' (2018).

II. The Poet Laureate

While *Against all the Odds* and *Poems for Grenfell Tower* constitute an almost 'guerilla' poetic response to national events, there is also the 'official' poetic representative, the poet laureate.

John Betjeman, laureate between 1972 and 1984, was silent on the subject of the miners' strike 1984-5. This is not a surprise. Betjeman died in 1984 and had not published a full collection of poetry—apart from the anthologies *Church Poems* (1981) and *Uncollected Poems* (1982)—since 1974's *A Nip in the Air*. Added to this, it would be something of a stretch to call Betjeman, bar his championing of Victorian architecture, a political poet.¹⁶ Yet, the role of laureate is undeniably political. In the UK, the poet laureate is assigned the role of 'commemorating' events of national importance, when the nation is supposed to share a united viewpoint. However, as these events are often royal in nature—engagements, births, marriages and deaths being high on the list—'national importance' is often tied to the monarchy. That those commemorations are 'performed' by a writer appointed by the monarch (on advice of the government)—the poet appointed laureate also becomes a member of Her Majesty's Household—means that the laureate acts as a guide or courtier who represents the court's interest.¹⁷ Although Carol Ann Duffy is the current laureate, the role she fulfills is somewhat removed from the more 'deferential' types of laureate both Betjeman and later Ted Hughes would have been expected to fulfil. Andrew Motion said at the end of his tenure as laureate in 2009 that over the ten years he had been laureate 'the old sense of "them" and "us", establishment and avant-garde, London and regions, [had] matured into a curiosity that [was] willing to cross old boundaries' (Motion 2009). Motion does comment that while there 'was certainly no job description', he expected that he would 'occasionally write poems about events in the royal calendar'. Motion only ended up writing eight royal poems in his ten years as laureate, but also broadened the remit of the role by writing 'about homelessness for the Salvation Army, about bullying for Childline, about the foot and mouth outbreak for the Today programme, about the Paddington rail disaster', about 9/11, and Harry Patch, the last surviving combat veteran of the First World War (Motion 2009). This paved the way for Duffy and some of her poems critical of the government, such as her 2009 anti-Iraq war poem, 'Big Ask'. In the poem,

¹⁶ Off the back of this architectural championing, a 2.1m tall statue of Betjeman was installed at St. Pancras station in 2007. Incidentally, this statue was unveiled by Andrew Motion, the poet laureate between 1999 and 2009. Betjeman's politics extended only so far as being 'a press attache in the British embassy in Dublin in the early years of [World War Two] planting British propaganda in newspapers and trying to counter the energetic efforts of his German opposite number' when he came to the attention of the IRA (Gibbons 2000).

¹⁷ As members of the Royal Household, according to the website of the Royal Family, 'provide invaluable support to the Royal Family—enabling them to fulfil their duties and serve the nation' ('Inside The Royal Household').

Duffy criticises Guantanamo Bay, illegal torture techniques and the 'sexing' up of dossiers that led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, before closing with the lines: 'The WMD...you found the stash? / *Well, maybe not in Iraq*' (2009).¹⁸

However, before Motion reshaped the role of the laureate, it was still one of deference. After Diana Windsor's death, the laureate of the time, Ted Hughes, did write a poem to mark the occasion, 'The Aftermath: Poem for a lost princess', in which he references this mass emotional response when he writes: 'Holy tragedy and loss / Make the many one' (1997). The poem was published in newspapers on the 5th September 1997, the day before Diana's funeral at which Elton John performed 'Candle in the Wind' for the first, and only, time. Elton John's reworking of his song about Marilyn Monroe was in some essence the 'poetic expression' of that collective emotion. The song managed to articulate the popular emotional response to Diana's death in a way the palace didn't wish or didn't know how to. This was not a new poem or a song, but a repurposing of a song written for a long dead celebrity. While Hughes is attempting to express a sense of oneness through his poem—and possibly to offer some form of 'official' laureate and state response to the event—the poem was sidelined by a song that was taken on to define the emotions of the masses over the death of Diana Windsor. While Hughes witnesses the communal response, John serves to articulate it.

In terms of trade unions and labour, Ted Hughes, who took over the laureateship from Betjeman in December 1984, did publish the poem 'On the Reservations', in which he reimagines Northern miners as the oppressed Native American peoples—'tribally scarred (stitch-tattoos of coal-dust)' (2005, 776). In a letter from 1989, Hughes writes of the poem that:

The Reservations are now the superfluous Northern proletarian millions—released from the slavery of the lives that created them (their heroic labours to stay alive) but with nowhere to go, nothing to do etc, in a land occupied by 'the enemy'. That's how they feel & that's more less how they are. Paid by the State//to evaporate.

(2007, 566)

¹⁸ The dossier and WMDs that Duffy refers to is the government's *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government* report of 2002 which was used as one of the main arguments as to why Britain should go to war in Iraq in 2003. The foreword, by then Prime Minister Tony Blair, claimed that Saddam Hussein's military planning allowed 'for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them' ('UK dossier on Iraq' 2002). The next day, the UK's biggest selling newspaper, *The Sun*, ran a headline on its front page reading: 'Brits 45mins from doom' (Pascoe-Watson 2002). This claim was never proved in any form and weapons of mass destruction would never be found in Iraq. The *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction* found there to be no WMDs in Iraq and that 'Saddam's primary goal from 1991 to 2003 was to have UN sanctions lifted, while maintaining the security of the Regime' ('Regime Strategic Intent' 2004).

The letter from Hughes to his old friend Lucas Myers seems to position 'Reservations' as a poem of anger, an anger directed at those—'the enemy'—who had cast aside a northern industrial workforce that they both 'created' and exploited.¹⁹ When the letter was written in October 1989, the Thatcher government was still in power, although just over a year later she would resign from her position as Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party. The first section of the poem, 'Sitting Bull on Christmas Morning', opens with the lines:

Who put this pit-head wheel,
Smashed but carefully folded
In some sooty fields, into his stocking?
And this lifetime nightshift - a snarl
Of sprung celluloid? [...]
(Hughes 2005, 776)

The title of the poem and the reference to Sitting Bull suggests that Hughes sees the state as an occupying force in the North.²⁰ But with the reference to the Christmas 'stocking', he also suggests that the North and its people are expected to be almost grateful for the 'gift' of jobs that had 'scarred' them and the land.

This work was not published until 1988, a number of years after the strike had ended, before later being collected in 1989's *Wolfwatching*.²¹ As with Betjeman, perhaps to challenge Hughes on these political terms is undeserved. However, the public platform that the laureateship provides means that there is an argument to be made for this challenge. Sean O'Brien writes that while Hughes shows an interest in poets such as the Serbian Vasko Popa and the Hungarian János Pilinsky—Eastern Bloc poets who 'knew that the least utterance, however carefully encoded, is political'—'for the most part Hughes' "one story" leaves alone, or avoids, or is uninterested by the developing social and political reality of the British Isles

¹⁹ The two, Myers and Hughes, had met at Cambridge and, with others, produced the magazine *Saint Botolph's Review*. In 2001, Myers published the book, *Crow Steered / Berg Appeared: A Memoir of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath*.

²⁰ Sitting Bull was a Native American leader who had a 'vision', legend has it, of 'large numbers of soldiers, as thick as grasshoppers, descending from the sky into his camp'. But with the soldiers and their horses descending 'upside down', it was a sign that many soldiers would be killed (Reilly 2011, 124). The vision supposedly inspired the Native American 'army' and boosted their confidence ahead of the Battle of Little Bighorn (1876) in which the US forces were defeated.

²¹ For an analysis of this work, the chapter 'The Laureateship and the Miners' Strike' in Paul Bentley's book *Ted Hughes: Class and Violence* serves as a discussion as to what Bentley sees as the oft neglected political aspect of some of Hughes' poetry.

in his adult lifetime' (1998, 36-37).²² Although I agree with O'Brien to the extent that Hughes' poetry is generally uninterested in the 'political reality' of Britain, it seems undeniable to me that the act of accepting the laureateship is itself intensely political. As laureate your work comes to be read through a social and political reality for which you are the official poetic spokesperson. When Hughes was offered the laureateship by Margaret Thatcher he claimed that he felt as if he'd 'walked into a pit trap' and that 'refusing invoked as many demons as accepting' the role (2007, 495).²³ The 'pit trap' seems simply coincidental and not a nod towards the miners' strike that was occurring at the time. Nevertheless, to be offered the laureateship in the midst of the strike suggests that Hughes was not viewed as a poet who would be critical of the government in the dispute. In his letters, the 'demons' Hughes mentions are not made explicit, but they seem to have to do more with the 'public' role that being laureate would undoubtedly bring. Hughes felt that Philip Larkin, who Hughes believed had already been offered and subsequently rejected the laureateship, would have had the 'level-headedness to refuse' the 'infinite little silly problems' that came with the position, which Hughes himself did not (2007, 495). Later in the same letter, Hughes claimed that he had been sent over seven hundred letters and that the primary issue around the laureateship was that

[e]very third letter there's a request. Problem is, most people think of the Poet Laureate's role as a public convenience (it's the job's one inconvenience). They don't know yet that things have changed.

(2007, 496)

It is unclear as to what Hughes saw as having changed in the role. The letter, tongue in cheek as it appears to be, suggests that by and large the job of laureate for Hughes was in no way a 'convenient' one, and one that the public, at least to Hughes' mind, did not understand. Hughes was undoubtedly aware of the 'peculiarity' that comes with being laureate and the 'public' role that he had taken on:

This new life as Laureate has its strangeness. What is most strange of all is the role I now play in the rusty locked-up heart of the Anglo-Saxon common man [*sic*] woman and child. Very peculiar.

(Hughes 2007, 497-498)

²² By 'one story', O'Brien is referring to what he sees as Hughes' interweaving factors of 'the natural world and its mythic function' to create the 'one story' which appears to have provided Hughes with 'an apparently bottomless well of material' (1998, 37).

²³ Obviously, Hughes did accept the position, perhaps, as he states, with it having something to do with him 'performing one of [his] mother's wildest dreams' (2007, 496). Jonathan Bate writes that when thinking over the pros and cons of becoming laureate he called his sister and agent, Olwyn, and while she 'refrained from pressing him', she did remark 'that acceptance would be good for his American sales' (2015, 418).

The reach of Hughes' poetry was larger than ever before; it was now part of the world of the 'common' man in a way that it previously hadn't been. While the 'rusty locked-up heart' isn't the most endearing description of the 'common' person—whatever that means beyond people who would generally not read poetry and a suggestion of the emotional limitations of the common person—there is a comprehension, if not also a certain element of apprehension, of his new position, even beyond his poetry. It is worth noting that the word poetry or poem is not mentioned at all. In the letter Hughes continues by saying:

Everything I come out with is either (a) a megaphone blast from the peak of a mountain of soap-boxes (b) possibly the solution to the whole problem (c) an infinite sum drawn on infinite credit. So I have to be careful what inanities I come out with.

(Hughes 2007, 498)

Obviously Hughes is talking about his life as a poet and writer as much as anything else, but there is a clear sense that he is under a scrutiny as laureate that he simply never had to entertain as 'poet'. While he is clearly joking about the 'inanities' he comes out with, Hughes is making the point that his writing is now public, whether he wants it to be or not, and that he cannot necessarily control the type of readings that will become attached to his work, and life. His poetry has the potential to be mobilised in a way that means speaking to or about political issues becomes fraught.

In Hughes' case, his relationship with Sylvia Plath, her suicide, his marital infidelities, claims of domestic abuse and his 'response' to her poetry in 1998's *Birthday Letters*, have in some regards come to obscure other facets of his work and life.²⁴ In the Elaine Feinstein biography of Hughes, Hughes' fourteen-year tenure as laureate is dealt with in six pages. The year that encompassed the 1984-5 miners' strike occupies less than a page. The strike, Scargill and Thatcher are not to be found anywhere in the book. Jonathan Bate's *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (2015) does include a chapter entitled 'The Laureate', but, again, the miners' strike is not mentioned in any form. For those who would write about Hughes, the strike is simply not a feature. Feinstein notes that Hughes accepted the position 'all the more readily because he already believed that there was a close connection between the role of poet and the

²⁴ An article in *The Guardian* in advance of the publication of a biography about Hughes' partner Assia Wevill, with whom Hughes had started an affair a few months before Plath took her own life, details the range of domestic 'instructions' Wevill was supposed to carry out (Smith 2006). Wevill committed suicide in 1969 by using a gas oven, six years after Plath had taken her own life in the same way.

Recently some of Plath's correspondence with her analyst Dr Ruth Barnhouse have come to light in which Plath alleges that Hughes 'beat her two days before she miscarried their child'. These are claims which have been labelled as 'absurd' by Carol Hughes the widow of Ted (Kean 2017b).

symbolic place of royalty in society' (2001, 217). The role of poet and of royalty that Feinstein suggests positions them, not necessarily as actors themselves within a political and social landscape, but as illustrative examples of forms of society. Bate says that Hughes 'enjoyed writing Laureate poems' and that 'with his belief in poet as shaman of the tribe and the royal family as embodiment of the land, he took the role more seriously than any of his twentieth-century predecessors' (2015, 429). While the poet laureate may not have an effect on governance or how society or policy is shaped directly, they are a symbol or guide—at least during Hughes' tenure. The laureate is not a voice of the people, it is a voice coming from above of how society should respond to events of national importance.

In the letter quoted from in the previous paragraph, Hughes writes, in a tongue-in-cheek solution to the problems of his newly politicised position, that obviously 'it's best if I now become a silent recluse [...] and never write another word. So my capital will remain unsquandered & my interest will accrue' (Hughes 2007, 498). While clearly a joke, Hughes is pointing to the pressures of writing, or more specifically publishing, now he is laureate. The joke is that by saying nothing he can't harm his 'stake' as poet and as public figure; it is through silence that one's influence 'accrues', but it is through having opinions and voicing them that it can be damaged. In 1985, Hughes did publish 'Rain-Charms for the Duchy: A Blessed, Devout Drench for the Christening of His Royal Highness Prince Harry', a poem that only appears to be about the christening of the Prince in so much as its title explicitly references it. The original draft of the poem had been written for, but not included in, 1983's *River*.²⁵

Also in 1985, Hughes made his stance on labour politics more explicit in the poem 'The Best Worker in Europe'. While the poem was written in early 1985, it was uncollected until after Hughes' death. The poem was, however, broadcast on the *Today* programme in March 1985, during the miners' strike (2008).

²⁶ In this poem, Hughes positions a salmon as 'the best worker in Europe'. The poem opens with the lines:

The best worker in Europe
Is only six inch long.
You thought he'd be a bigger chap?
Wait till you hear my song, my dears,
Wait till you hear my song.
No Union cries his Yea or Nay.
He works for all, both night and day,
With neither subsidy nor pay.

²⁵ Jonathan Bate calls 'Rain-charms for the Duchy' 'a very good poem' which instantly achieved 'a standard [Hughes] would never reach again in his Laureate work' (2015, 419).

²⁶ The poem was also published in a limited edition run of 155 copies by the Atlantic Salmon Trust in 1985.

(Hughes 2005, 697)

The salmon appears an odd choice, with the fish not being particularly regarded for its collective spirit or selflessness. Yet, this seeming glorification of unpaid work (and the gratuitous side-swipe at unionism) is a troubling one. Hughes is suggesting a form of indentured servitude under the guise of working for 'all'. Hughes' statement that 'he works for all' suggests that he sees unions as occluding this type of almost neo-liberal individualism, through the control he sees them as having over their own members. It is not the worker who is crying 'yea or nay', it is the union itself. As Danny O'Connor states, 'here is the Poet Laureate publishing a contentious poem in a national newspaper [...] confronting a fractious debate and using the salmon as a symbol' (2016, 150).²⁷ The salmon as a symbol is one that is at odds with the ethos of the trade union movement. In regards to the 1984-5 miners' strike, the significance of the poet laureate, even a new one, voicing these 'contentious' opinions during the largest post-war industrial and political dispute in Britain puts them on the side of the state.

Paul Bentley, whose poetry has been examined in this thesis, calls the laureateship a 'problematic and distorting issue' when considering the work of Hughes (2014, 5), as it obscures the 'key ideological association latent in Hughes' pre-Laureate nature poems - namely: class' (Bentley 2014, 4). Tom Paulin and John Lucas in their writing on Hughes in *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State* (1992) and *Modern English Poetry: From Hardy to Hughes* (1986), respectively, see Hughes' poetry as having an 'entrepreneurial energy, in keeping with the ferocious free-market ethos of the Thatcher government that appointed Hughes Laureate' (Bentley 2014, 4). This is put rather succinctly by Bentley, although it is also clear that Bentley disagrees with this conclusion. Bentley does admit, in regards to 'The Best Worker in Europe', that 'the fish looks suspiciously like the embodiment of the Tory mantra of enterprise and self-sufficiency, from which everyone supposedly benefits' (2014, 98).

Bentley attempts to situate or account for Hughes' views by saying that

Hughes has been brought to this contemporary position by contemporary debates about government subsidies, uneconomic pits, and the non-democratic National Union of Mineworkers - which had refused to bow to political pressure to hold a national strike ballot.

(2014, 98)

²⁷ The national newspaper that O'Connor refers to is *The Times*. In the same year, Hughes published a celebratory poem for the Queen Mother, 'Little Salmon Hymn', dedicated to her as the "godmother of the salmon itself" (2016, 150). The 'salmon' dedication to the Queen Mother comes about because she was patron of the Salmon and Trout Association (Hughes 2005, 1216).

While all this may be true, Hughes' exclusion of 'The Best Worker in Europe' from his laureate collection, in an apparent attempt to 'put the lid back on this fraught political pressure point' (Bentley 2014, 99), seems only to increase the volume of the Poet Laureate's relative absence from 'contemporary debates'.

Bentley says that

Hughes might be sorry for the miners, but his old sense of class allegiance - the Tory establishment as an army of occupation - is problematized [in the poem] by his historical distrust of Marxism, in the shape of the NUM's uncompromising Marxist leader Arthur Scargill.

(2014, 98)

Hughes' own position on the NUM (and Scargill in particular) is somewhat less clear than Bentley makes it seem, at least in Hughes' letters. Hughes does not mention Scargill by name in the hundreds of letters in Christopher Reid's *Letters of Ted Hughes*. In one of the few letters that refers to industrial action, sent to Jack Brown, a Labour county councillor from Yorkshire, in November 1982, Hughes writes that: 'I felt disappointed for you in your political impasse up there' (2007, 462). The footnote, written by Christopher Reid in the *Letters of Ted Hughes*, explains that the

'political impasse', devastating to such mining communities as Barnsley, was the strike led by Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, and the defiance of it by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.'

(Hughes 2007, 463)

The phrase 'political impasse' that Hughes uses, pointing to a form of stasis and lack of progress, would seem to assign a portion of blame to both sides of the argument. In the same letter, Hughes is significantly more explicit in his feelings about 'Tory dominance' and its effect on politics:

It occurs to me that more and more often the prolonged Tory dominance—the gradual consolidate of the Eton/Oxford/Tory axis in all positions of social influence—is beginning to have a narrowing and shallowing effect on the cultural atmosphere.

(2007, 462)

This letter, written only two years before Hughes would become laureate, is clear in expressing how Hughes sees the Tory party, and a certain form of political elite more generally, as having a constricting effect on culture in the early 1980s. Even while laureate, Hughes would say in a letter to the poet Michael Hamburger in 1987 that the 'problem, maybe, is that Margaret [Thatcher] can't be frightened' and that 'she's like the general who says "we can afford 25% casualties"' (2007, 538). In 1987, just before the general election in which Thatcher would win a third term as Prime Minister, Hughes published in

The Times a 'poetic contribution' to the election debate. The poem, 'First Things First: An Election Duet, performed in the Womb by foetal twins', attacks Western governments who value economic activity over environmental protection: 'the cost of the Gross National Product is / for trees no leaves / and waters no fish' (Hughes 2005, 730). As Bate writes, the poem

blamed man's head long obsession with economic growth, and more particularly the policies of Western governments and the regulations of the European Economic Community, for a mountain of wasted butter, for contaminated tap water, leukaemia brought on by pesticides sprayed on fields, and even the phenomenon of cot death.

(2015, 425)²⁸

While this polemic from Hughes is directed more broadly at 'government' than it is the Conservative party, Hughes is clearly not pro-Thatcher or pro-Conservative party. However, he does not add his voice, the loudest poetic voice of the time, to those voices speaking up and contending with the treatment of the miners and their families during the 1984-5 strike.

The reason for this move into the work of Hughes is designed to show the 'gap' between 'official' narratives and the work being produced by the poets I have focussed on. The writers I have examined are attempting to fill, or at least contend with, precisely this gap, in official verse culture. I wrote at the outset of this section on laureateship that the role of the laureate is about commemorating 'occasions', more specifically royal occasions. This emphasis on the 'royal' determines the perspective from which the laureate was expected to write, that of the court (and state). On the occasion of the miners' strike 1984-5, the Poet Laureate Ted Hughes was ambivalent. Even after the event, Hughes was not forthcoming; the poets this thesis focusses on were. In *Against All The Odds* and *Poems for Grenfell Tower*, the writers are attempting to establish a narrative that is outside of the 'facts' and quantitative assertions of 'how many people were arrested', 'how many people lost their jobs' or 'how much did these incidents cost'. There is an attempt in these collections, not necessarily to control the narrative, but to make sure that there is a narrative voice that comes from a culturally marginalised perspective. For *Against All The Odds*, there is a sense of poetry as an accessible form, one that has an immediacy, one that can be disseminated on the fringes of, and counter to, mainstream narratives. In *Poems for Grenfell Tower*, poetry acts as an articulation of the angers and fears that emerge as a result of such

²⁸ Hughes writes that 'if the cost of a mountain of butter is / poisoned water in your and / Cot-death' and 'if the cost of Gross National Product is / for trees no leaves / for waters no fish [...] Then let what can't be sold to your brother and sister be / released on the third world' (1987, 10).

tragedies. The poetry in these collections is part of an intervention, an intervention that serves to declare that these voices exist and cannot be discounted.

Conclusion

Without a knowledge of what happened in the past, it is very difficult for us to counter the political 'common sense' that the world has to be the way it is.

- Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (2014)

One phrase that reappears through the poems in this thesis one that was briefly mentioned in the introduction, is 'the enemy within'. In 1982, Margaret Thatcher, in regards to the miners and the trade union movement generally, said: 'We had to fight the enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is much more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty' (Thatcher in Travis 2013). In Harrison's 'V', Thatcher's words become 'half versus half, the enemies within' (2008, 23), in O'Brien's 'London Road' the narrator says that 'I've seen the enemy within / The ones I left behind' (1987, 29), whereas Bentley's 'The Two Magicians' sees 'something rising towards us on the news. / The enemy within' (2011, 11). The repetition of the phrase demonstrates not simply a thematic link between the works but the way in which certain narratives and legacies become entrenched, and begin to occupy the language through which certain historical events and groups are represented. In 'London Road', published just two years after the end of the 1984-5 strike, O'Brien is already aware of the formation of these legacies in the ones he 'left behind'. Alan Sinfield claims that 'powerful stories—those useful to powerful groups—tend to drive out others' (Sinfield 2007, 28). The phrase from Thatcher has continued, it has been imported into the poem, but the miners, the unions and their legacies have not. It is not simply the miners and their families which have been left behind, it is also their ability to control the way their histories are told and retold. Bentley takes this a step further, for we are not presented with a people 'left behind' at all, it is now a news report which carries Thatcher's message. What persists is this phrase, 'the enemy within'. It may have been slightly altered, it may have been packaged differently, but it is still there. Charles Bernstein writes that 'poetry can bring to awareness questions of authority and conventionality, not to overthrow them, as in a certain reading of destructive intent, but to reconfigure: a necessary defiguration as prerequisite for refiguration' (1990). What this example shows is the way, while certain union narratives and legacies may dominate, these poems draw attention to the 'construction' and the constructed nature of these narratives. Dominant narratives do not so much 'drive out' others, but, rather, they attempt to subdue or subsume them. Poems draw attention to their own construction simply through the white space they leave on the page. To return to the Armitage quotation from the previous chapter, they are arrayed 'in formation' (2012, 5):

a formation that is clearly constructed around a series of aesthetic and linguistic choices. These poems are a challenge. 'Poetry engages public language as its roots, in that it tests the limits of conventionality while forging alternate conventions' (Bernstein 1990). What the poems in this thesis do, by bringing these dominant narratives onto the page (alongside various reminiscences, retellings and reenactments of trade union histories and legacies), is foreground not simply the constructed nature of the poem, but, as a corollary, the constructed nature of the narratives and legacies that have come to dominate discussions surrounding industrial disputes and labour representations.

With reference to the Grenfell Tower poetry collection that I look at in Chapter Five, it would be interesting to return to the collection in a number of years to consider how these immediate (poetic) responses to the fire have either come to inform the narrative and 'cultural legacy' of the disaster, or how future writers (and filmmakers or documentarians) have come to contend with its legacy, at a remove.

The three poets that constitute the 'foundation', Barry MacSweeney, Tony Harrison and Sean O'Brien, contend with the strikes not long after they had finished, with the stories of the industrial disputes about which they write already in the process of crystallising.

Harrison writes in 'V', published only six months after the end of the 1984-5 strike, that 'the unending violence of US and THEM' is 'personified in 1984' (2008, 11). If 1984 has come to represent or embody this notion of violence, then it follows that the narratives surrounding the strike come to be represented in a particular fashion, for this is the 'material' from which these narratives are constructed. Or, it is that the 'official' stories that are already being told foreground this idea of violence, and it is these stories that are instilling (or have instilled) this quality into the year. Harrison says that 'on the late-night national news we see / police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate, / old violence and old disunity' (2008, 30). Harrison is not saying that this 'old violence and old disunity' is simply a long-held antagonism between the pickets and the police (or the workers and the state), but that the way the strike is being reported and presented is through 'old' images and stories. The narrative of the strike is already solidifying so that this 'old' disunity is coming to shape and then justify a political present. The official story of the strike is already beginning to take form. O'Brien's 'Summertime' begins with the line 'the news is old' and ends by saying '*that kind of thing can't happen here, / And when it does it isn't true*' (1987, 18). The news is 'old' because the story is always the same. If something comes to contradict or challenge this view of the strike or the events of the dispute it simply 'isn't true'. It is not that these 'things', these

counter-narratives, don't exist, it is that they 'can't happen here'. They can't be allowed to happen, they can't destabilise the narrative. That 'kind of thing' can't happen within the realm of the 'official' narrative, it can only happen in another place, in this case, within O'Brien's poem. In MacSweeney's 'The Shell's Her Auburn Hair Did Show', the narrator asks the questions 'what / does a government do? Can it make you speak?' (2003, 204). If the government can make you speak it can also silence you. By controlling the way stories are told, you shape the way these stories come to be retold. In 'Black Torch Sunrise', MacSweeney writes of newspapers and televisions reporting through their 'suitable captions / of a certain persuasion' (1978, 71). 'Persuasion' doubles as the act through which to convince someone and as a set of political beliefs. While *The Telegraph* happily reports that 'days lost in strikes are the lowest in seven years' (MacSweeney 1978, 71), the whipping of 'left-bank women students' begins to 'blur on the shimmered screen' (MacSweeney 1978, 72). The narrative is altered, to obscure that which doesn't fit with the 'certain persuasion', the 'official' version of the story. MacSweeney's 'blurring' demonstrates that these alternative narratives cannot be completely eradicated, they are still there, but they are in need of something to bring them into focus. The poems highlight the insidious nature of these stories, and the groups that seek to control the narrative and legacies of industrial relations. Yet, these 'older' works are also creating a place in which these narratives can be reconsidered (and exposed), while, at the same time, they are themselves contributing to the narratives and legacies that are found in the poems that have been published in the past decade.

In the works of Helen Mort, Steve Ely and Paul Bentley, what we see is an attempt to contend with trade union and strike legacies that have become permeated by and imbued with decades of narrative and counter-narrative, in a UK in which trade union representation continues to decline. Mort's 'Scab' references Jeremy Deller's reenactment of the Battle of Orgreave, along with the movie *Brassed Off* and her own experiences of growing up in Sheffield and attending university in Cambridge, before the narrator is 'left to guess which picket line [they've] crossed' (2013, 22-23). These strike reminiscences and narratives are portrayed as being so entwined with one another that the legacy of the 1984-5 miners' strike is one of fragments. The 'picket line' is still there, but the terms of the dispute are now unclear. The legacies of the strike have come to supplant the understanding of the strike's origins. The trade unions in the poem are conspicuously absent, their role in the legacies of the strike nullified. 'Scab' ends with the lines 'someone / has scrawled the worst insult they can - / a name. Look close. It's yours' (2013, 22). These lines echo Harrison's 'he aerosolled his name. And it was mine' (2008, 22). Harrison's work is shown to now be part of these legacies. Harrison's reflexive 'mine', a comment on his own role as

poet and the legacy of his work at the end of the 1984-5 strike, is reversed by Mort to show how we are all implicated and complicit in curating and continuing these strike legacies and narratives.

In 'The Two Magicians', Bentley fills the space of the poem with 'visitors' from *Thurcroft*, with song lyrics, snatches of canonical poetry, references to television and personal reminiscences, in a fashion that foregrounds the constructed, and occasionally convoluted, nature of our stories and narratives. In the poem, all of these voices come to occupy the space that Bentley has created to tell his strike narrative, yet Bentley has brought them there. Bentley writes that 'all hath suffered change' (2011, 17), it is not simply the people who have lived through the strike, but those affected by its legacy who are part of this 'change'.¹ The voices in the poem compete with, augment and reposition one other, while still being presented as a cohesive whole through Bentley's work. Bentley presents what at first appears a singular strike narrative, highlighting the ways in which our historical narratives can take on the appearance of inevitability and dominant narratives come to be seen as the only narrative. Yet, Bentley is exposing the performance that is at the heart of any narrative and cultural legacy. Of the poem itself, Bentley said that he thought of the poem 'as a poem of voices - a patchwork of direct quotations, memories, and echoes, stitched loosely onto the old ballad' form (Bentley). Legacies, particularly in this case of the 1984-5 strike, are neither absolute nor the product of a single voice, they are a 'patchwork' of experiences and cultural products that are (both intentionally and inadvertently) 'stitched together' into a form that enables us to justify, to make sense of, or challenge, a political and cultural present.

For Steve Ely's poetry, 'the past is not past: it is in the present and intrinsic to it; it is how the present came to be' (Pugh 2015). While both Mort and Bentley omit any reference to trade unions in their poems, and only include passing reference to either Margaret Thatcher or Arthur Scargill, for Ely the unions and the figures that come to represent them are at the heart of the poems. Whereas Mort and Bentley seem to see the narrative of the 1984-5 strike as no longer including (or having space for) trade unions, Ely sees unions and the history of industrial struggle as intrinsic to understanding the political and labour present. In his poetic history of the NUM and trade union oppression, 'Ballad of the Scabs', Ely writes that 'all those bastards need to win / is Brotherhood to fail' and that the war on the 'state machine' is only 'won by unity' (2015, 139 & 142). This 'unity' that Ely writes of is one that comes from the working class being 'prepared to stand and fight' (2015, 139), a fight that is led by a strong union movement. If Bentley's work is a 'patchwork' of different voices that exist alongside one another, Ely's

¹ The line is itself a potential repurposing of Ariel's song from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* when she sings: 'Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange' (1.2.399-401).

voices are openly antagonistic. Be it through his 'Theatre of Hate' in the playlet 'Nithin', the battle between Arthur Wellesley and Peter Mandelson for the attentions of the 'swinish multitude' in 'Scum of the Earth' or the imagined *Question Time* face-off between Arthur Scargill and Cecil Parkinson, Ely's voices compete for space and attention. Ely's work presents the narratives surrounding trade unions as actively under threat from the state and 'official' narratives. Ely's work raises the 'voice' of the unions and the working classes, not always in a way that is comfortable or comforting, to allow them to take up arms against these dominant legacies that seek to exclude them.

The exploration of trade union representations and legacies in this thesis has endeavoured to show that 'the decision to weaken the trade unions and thus the economic and political power of working-class people – as workers and as consumers – was just that: a decision, not an inevitability. It was a political choice taken by a ruling class' (Todd 2014). This state-sponsored drive to weaken unions in the UK was carried out, in part, through a concerted effort to control the narratives and stories that are told regarding strike action and labour politics. Yet, 'not for the first time, poets have declined to say what politicians would like to hear' (O'Brien 2003, 571). What the poems in this thesis do is speak to labour narratives. The decline in trade union representation in the UK has led to a crystallisation of the narratives that surround trade unions and union legacies. These poems remind us of how narratives and legacies are formed, and make it possible to see how they may be rewritten.

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Figure 2: Mcphee, Don. *Miners' Strike, Orgreave*. 1984. *Division Street*. By Helen Mort, London: Chatto and Windus, 2013.

Figure 3: Still of new and old boundaries of North-South divide. *The North-South Divide*. BBC4, 14 Apr. 2009. TV Broadcast.

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